

ETHIOPIA

Attacks on schools and universities, and their military use, continued in 2022 and 2023. GCPEA identified more than 90 reports of attacks on schools, particularly in northern Tigray, Afar, Amhara, and Benishangul-Gumuz states or regions. The Ethiopian government and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front signed a “cessation of hostilities” agreement in November 2022, although conflict resumed in Amhara in August 2023.

CONTEXT

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, armed conflict continued in Ethiopia’s northern Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regions between Ethiopian government forces, as well as government-aligned forces such as the Eritrean army, and forces affiliated with Tigray’s regional government led by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).¹ Violence also persisted in the south-central Oromia region.² Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported that all actors in the conflict in the northern regions committed human rights violations and war crimes, such as extrajudicial executions and sexual violence.³ After preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid to Tigray region in early 2022,⁴ the government announced a truce that temporarily alleviated fighting and permitted humanitarian access to the region in March of that year.⁵ In August 2022, fighting escalated and the delivery of humanitarian aid was once again inhibited, according to International Crisis Group.⁶ Airstrikes in Mekelle and Adi Daero, the capital of Tigray region and a town there, killed civilians including children in August and September 2022, as reported by Amnesty International.⁷ The Ethiopian army regained control of three towns from the TPLF in October 2022;⁸ the following month, the Ethiopian government and Tigrayan forces reached a “cessation of hostilities” agreement after two years of conflict.⁹ The ceasefire generally held until August 2023, when conflict resumed in the Amhara region.¹⁰

In Oromia region, the government relaunched its counterinsurgency campaign against the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in May 2023 after peace talks ended without an agreement the previous month.¹¹ In June 2022, armed men killed approximately 400 ethnic Amhara people in Oromia region, while government security forces took several hours to respond, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.¹² Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced due to hostilities in the region.¹³

In 2023, approximately 20 million people, including 10.8 million children, required humanitarian aid across Ethiopia.¹⁴ However, internet outages and limited fuel, in addition to fighting, impacted access to assistance.¹⁵ As of October 2023, 4.39 million people were internally displaced due to conflict and natural disasters.¹⁶ Internally displaced people and Eritrean refugee women and children in Tigray, Afar, and Amhara were particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, according to the UN.¹⁷

Violence and natural disasters continued to impact education during the reporting period. Approximately 7.6 million children were out-of-school at the end of 2023 due to conflict, draught, and the humanitarian situa-

tion.¹⁸ In Gambela and Amhara regions, floods damaged 125 schools and over 455 schools, respectively, impacting 270,000 children, according to the UN.¹⁹ The UN also reported that, in conflict-affected regions, approximately 3,860 schools were closed in 2022, leaving over 2.8 million children without access to education.²⁰ The truce signed in November 2022 between the government of Ethiopia and the TPLF included a provision concerning education in conflict-affected communities, namely, “Students must go to school...”²¹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 90 reports of attacks on schools. In comparison, GCPEA collected at least 24 incidents of attacks on schools in 2021 and at least eight such attacks in 2020.²² During both reporting periods, NGOs, the media, and the UN reported on the widespread damage or destruction of schools during conflict in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and Benishangul-Gumuz states or regions; however, much of the reporting did not specify the year in which damages occurred or if it resulted from attacks by armed forces or armed groups rather than other violence, looting, the presence of internally displaced persons in schools, or another cause. These reports were not included in the total number of attacks on schools for either reporting period, meaning they may be significant undercounts. Likewise international media outlet *Reuters* and Human Rights Watch reported that internet shutdowns limited reporting of human rights abuses in Tigray region.²³

In 2022, the UN identified 77 attacks on schools in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and Benishangul-Gumuz states or regions.²⁴ Separately, GCPEA collected around 14 reports of attacks on schools that year, several of which may have overlapped with the UN count.²⁵ In addition, the Education Cluster determined that, as of December 2022, Ethiopia had more than 9,000 damaged or destroyed schools, mostly due to conflict, many in Tigray and Amhara regions.²⁶ Examples of incidents GCPEA collected included:

- Human Rights Watch reported that, on January 7, 2022, an Ethiopian government drone dropped three explosives on a school in Dedebeit town, Tigray region, killing at least 57 civilians and wounding 42 others.²⁷ International media outlet *The Washington Post* reported that those killed were mostly women, children, and older persons, using the school as a shelter.²⁸ One school building and several temporary shelters were reportedly damaged.²⁹
- A school sheltering displaced persons was shelled in late May 2022 in Sheraro town, Tigray region, as reported by international media outlet *Al Jazeera* and ACLED.³⁰
- On June 10, 2022, a heavy artillery shell left on the premises of Silk Amba School reportedly exploded in Dessie town, Amhara region. The Ethiopia Peace Observatory reported that the explosion injured three students.³¹
- On August 26, 2022, an airstrike hit a kindergarten in Mekelle city, Tigray region, killing several children and injuring others, according to the UN.³² *The New York Times*, *Vatican News*, and other international media outlets reported that the attack appeared to strike a playground next to the kindergarten, where children were playing.³³
- On October 4, 2022, an airstrike hit a school in Adi Daero town, Tigray region, killing more than 50 internally displaced persons seeking shelter there, as reported by international media outlet *Reuters*.³⁴

- On October 24, 2022, a drone strike reportedly hit a school, killing students, in Chobi district, West Shewa zone, Oromia region, according to local media *Addis Standard* and other outlets.³⁵

In 2023, the UN reported that schools in Gambela and Itang woredas, or districts, in Afar region closed due to fighting in May, keeping more than 600 students from classes for over two weeks.³⁶ Across the Amhara region, damage and looting closed 157 schools in the first six months of 2023, preventing over 671,000 students, nearly half of them girls, from attending school.³⁷ In Oromia region, the presence of armed groups led 625 schools to close in the first half of the year, impacting 225,000 students, according to the UN.³⁸ In addition, the Education Cluster reported in September 2023 that 8,552 schools were damaged in Amhara, Oromia, and other regions.³⁹ Since it was unclear whether the school closures or damages met GCPEA's definition of attacks on schools, these numbers were not included in the count of attacks on schools in the report.

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least eight attacks on schools.⁴⁰ Separately, the UN reported 12 attacks on schools, students, and staff in Oromia, Tigray, and Amhara regions.⁴¹ However, it was unclear how many of these attacks were against schools, so they were not included in the total count for this attack type. Examples of reports of attacks on schools collected by GCPEA included:

- In late January 2023, at least two public schools were reportedly looted and burned down in Shew Robit town, North Shewa zone, Amhara region, according to ACLED and a local media outlet.⁴²
- In early February 2023, humanitarian demining units cleared or cordoned off explosive remnants of war or unexploded ordnance in Kola Temben and Wejerat schools in Kola Temben and Hintalo Wajirat districts, Tigray region, according to the Protection Cluster.⁴³
- The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported that, on August 6 and 7, 2023, the Ethiopian National Defense Force and Fano armed group clashed in Debre Birhan city, Amhara region. During combat, artillery shells and crossfire killed civilians and hit civilian buildings, including a school.⁴⁴
- On November 28, 2023, bombs exploded near at least two schools in Bahir Dar city, Amhara region, as reported by international media outlet *Deutsche Welle*. Although no injuries were reported, parents and caregivers kept students home the following day out of fear, and nearby schools canceled exams.⁴⁵

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

GCPEA collected at least ten reported incidents of attacks on school students and educators in 2022 and 2023. In October 2023, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia reported that parents in Afar region had at times been afraid to send their children to school due to the presence of explosive remnants of war along school routes since the conflict began in November 2020.⁴⁶

In 2022, GCPEA identified three reports of attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel.⁴⁷ For instance:

- On March 23, 2022, five students were allegedly shot and killed at school in Maksa Leku kebele, Cobi woreda, Oromia region.⁴⁸

- On October 19, 2022, a drone strike reportedly killed 14 people, three of whom were students on their way to school, in Meta Walkite district, West Shewa zone, Oromia region, according to local and international news outlets and ACLED.⁴⁹

In 2023, GCPEA collected at least seven reported incidents of attacks on students and educators.⁵⁰ For instance:

- In early January 2023, in Lalo district, West Wellega zone, Oromia region, police reportedly detained 24 teachers from six schools who questioned a government policy that takes one month's wages from their salary. According to local media outlet *Addis Standard*, the teachers were detained for over a week.⁵¹
- On July 29, 2023, unidentified gunmen killed the head of the Guba Lafto Woreda Education Office in North Wollo zone, Amhara region, as reported by a local news outlet and ACLED.⁵²
- In December 2023, teachers were detained in Hadiya zone, Central Ethiopia regional state, after protesting over the non-payment of wages, as reported by EHRC, media outlet *Addis Standard*, and ACLED.⁵³
- In mid-December 2023, at least three teachers were reportedly abducted from a secondary school in Dembecha town, Amhara Region. One teacher was allegedly shot and killed, while the others were later released.⁵⁴

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

GCPEA identified at least sixteen reports of military use of schools and universities in 2022 and 2023. *Education under Attack 2022* included approximately 60 reported incidents of military use in 2021 and around ten such incidents in 2020.⁵⁵ The number of military use incidents in 2022 and 2023 may be an undercount; during the reporting period, the UN received unverified reports of 381 military use of school incidents.⁵⁶

In 2022, GCPEA collected at least six reports of military use.⁵⁷ The UN reported that armed forces were using schools in North Wello, North Gonder, and Wag Hemra zones, Amhara region, in April and June 2022.⁵⁸ Separately, the UN reported the military use of two schools and one hospital in Tigray and Oromia regions in 2022.⁵⁹ GCPEA also identified a report of an alleged armed actor using a school to hide and as a firing position in Gambela town, Agnewak zone, Gambela region.⁶⁰

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least ten reports of military use.⁶¹ In May and June of that year, the UN reported that internally displaced persons sought shelter in, and military forces or armed groups occupied, around 100 schools in Tigray and Amhara regions.⁶² However, it was unclear how many of these incidents were occupation rather than IDPs seeking shelter, so the number is not included in the total count for military use. Examples of reports GCPEA collected included:

- Media outlets and Amnesty International reported that the police used schools to detain people in Addis Ababa after conflict in the Amhara region resumed in August 2023.⁶³
- EHRC reported the military use of Dejazmach Tesema Irgete Primary and Secondary School, Jehuha Primary School, and Bechna Belai Zeleq Preparatory School in Amhara region in late October 2023.⁶⁴

- In early November 2023, Fano militias reportedly partially occupied a primary school in Wadera district, Amhara region. On November 6, a government drone allegedly hit the school, killing three teachers and four other civilians, according to the UN and a news report.⁶⁵

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified six reports of attacks on higher education. In *Education under Attack 2022*, GCPEA identified around eight reports of higher education attacks in 2021 and six such attacks in 2020.⁶⁶ As in previous years, the incidents during this reporting period included both education-related protest repression and conflict-related violence.

In 2022, GCPEA collected five reports of attacks on higher education.⁶⁷ For example:

- The UN reported that, on January 11, 2022, the Ethiopian air force allegedly carried out an airstrike on the Technical Vocational Education and Training institute, killing three men and injuring 21 people, many of them women, in Mekelle city, Tigray region.⁶⁸ The status of those killed and injured as students or academics was unclear.
- On June 25, 2022, police reportedly beat and forcibly dispersed students marching from Addis Ababa University to an off-campus site. According to Scholars and Risk and international and local news outlets, the police also forcibly prevented some students from leaving campus to join the other protesters. The students were reportedly protesting over ethnic violence against Amhara communities.⁶⁹
- On September 13, 2022, a drone strike hit the business campus of Mekelle University in Mekelle city, Tigray region, as reported by international media outlet *Al Jazeera* and ACLED.⁷⁰

In 2023, GCPEA identified one attack on higher education. In early August, armed clashes took place near Gondar University in Gondar city, Amhara region, as reported by a civil society organization and the international media outlet *Deutsche Welle*. The clashes reportedly killed dozens of civilians, including a professor who was administering an exam for secondary students at the university. Students were also reportedly injured, and more than 16,000 students were unable to take the 12th-grade national exam.⁷¹

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