

# IRAQ

Attacks on education continued in several regions of Iraq in 2022 and 2023, with a decline in the final months of the reporting period. As in previous years, explosives were used in attacks on schools, and police continued to use excessive force during education-related protests. The military use of schools increased compared to the previous reporting period.

## CONTEXT

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, Iraq continued to experience political unrest and violence.<sup>1</sup> Following the parliamentary elections in October 2021, politicians were unable to form a government or implement reforms for a year, and protesters occupied the parliament building in Baghdad in July 2022, according to media reports.<sup>2</sup> In August 2022, Muqtada Al-Sadr, a religious and political leader, withdrew from politics, leading to violent clashes between protesters and security forces in Baghdad, which resulted in at least 30 people killed and hundreds more injured, according to Human Rights Watch and media reports.<sup>3</sup> Iraqi parliamentarians elected Abdul Latif Rashid to the presidency in October 2022, who appointed Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as prime minister, ending the year-long political deadlock.<sup>4</sup> In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Kurdish authorities arrested government critics, journalists, and activists ahead of planned protests in August 2022, as reported by Human Rights Watch.<sup>5</sup>

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continued to carry out attacks against civilians and Iraqi security forces during the reporting period, particularly in the north and central regions of the country, although at a reduced rate compared to previous years.<sup>6</sup> ISIL killed a dozen civilian farmers in Kirkuk and Diyala governorates in May 2022.<sup>7</sup> In December 2022, ISIL claimed responsibility for attacks near Kirkuk and Albu Bali cities that killed 17 people, including nine policemen, according to the UN.<sup>8</sup> Iraqi military forces carried out operations against ISIL fighters in 2022 and 2023.<sup>9</sup>

The Turkish military continued to conduct cross-border attacks against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK), a non-state armed group active in the northern Iraqi governorates of Erbil, Dahuk, Nineveh, and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>10</sup> The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported an increase in the number of attacks by Turkish armed forces in Iraq in 2022, compared to 2021.<sup>11</sup> Attacks included Turkish airstrikes against the PKK in northern Iraq during the reporting period.<sup>12</sup> In February 2023, the PKK announced a unilateral ceasefire with Turkish forces following the large-scale earthquake in Türkiye and Syria.<sup>13</sup> The ceasefire ended in June of that year when a key member of the group was killed in Sulaymaniyah.<sup>14</sup>

As of late 2023, the UN reported that 1.1 million Iraqis were internally displaced.<sup>15</sup> In January 2023, 2.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Iraq, including 1.1 million children.<sup>16</sup>

Approximately 680,000 internally displaced and returnee children faced barriers to accessing learning in Sep-

tember 2022, which included lack of civil documents and educational costs.<sup>17</sup> One-third of schools in Mosul were damaged from prior fighting, as of July 2022, resulting in half of the city's students attending class in damaged facilities.<sup>18</sup> At the higher education level, the University of Mosul rebuilt and reopened the central library in February 2022, eight years after an ISIL attack damaged it.<sup>19</sup>

## ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified at least six reported attacks on schools in 2022 and 2023. This is a decrease as compared to *Education under Attack 2022*, which included six and five reported attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>20</sup> During both reporting periods, many of the incidents involved explosive devices installed in or near schools.

In 2022, the UN verified two attacks on schools by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and an unidentified perpetrator.<sup>21</sup> Since it was unclear how many attacks from the UN overlapped with reports collected by GCPEA, they were not included in the total number of attacks on schools for this report, to avoid double counting. GCPEA identified at least four reports of attacks on schools in 2022:

- Unidentified assailants launched rockets that damaged a school in the Green Zone in Karkh district, Baghdad, on January 13, 2022, as reported by local media outlet *Shafaq News*.<sup>22</sup> A woman and child were injured in the attack, although their status as student or teacher was unclear.
- An explosive device detonated near the Al Noor Private School in Amarah city, Maysan governorate, on February 11, 2022, according to local media outlet *Shafaq News*.<sup>23</sup>
- A school in a refugee camp in Koya, Kurdistan region, was attacked on September 29, 2022, as reported by the UN.<sup>24</sup> Two children were injured and a pregnant woman was killed, although their status as students or a teacher was unclear.
- Iraqi police reportedly defused a grenade found at the gate of a school in Daquq district, Kirkuk governorate, on December 22, 2022. Classes were suspended for five days, affecting 198 students enrolled in the school, as reported by the *National Iraqi News Agency*.<sup>25</sup>

In 2023, the UN reported one attack on a school.<sup>26</sup> Separately, GCPEA identified two reports of attacks on schools:

- On April 24, 2023, an explosive device detonated outside a school under construction in the Shatrah district, Dhi Qar governorate, causing the school's outer fence to collapse, as reported by local media outlet *Shafaq News*.<sup>27</sup>
- On May 15, 2023, unidentified assailants reportedly opened fire at a private school in an unspecified location in Maysan governorate. This was the second time the school had been attacked, as reported by local media outlet *Al Mirbad*.<sup>28</sup>

## ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected three reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA collected approximately four and ten reports of such attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>29</sup> GCPEA identified three reports of attacks on education personnel in 2022:

- Police arrested two contract teachers who were demonstrating for employment opportunities in Erbil city, Kurdistan region, on September 6, 2022, as reported by a local media outlet and ACLED.<sup>30</sup>
- Police arrested several recent secondary school graduates who were demonstrating against their university placements in Soran city, Erbil governorate, Kurdistan region, on October 27, 2022, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>31</sup>
- On November 20, 2022, police reportedly used tear gas near a primary school in Sulaymaniyah city and governorate with the aim of dispersing nearby University of Sulaymaniyah students demonstrating over student fees, as detailed below. The use of tear gas caused about 100 primary-school students to fall unconscious, according to a local media source.<sup>32</sup>

GCPEA did not identify any attacks on students or education personnel in 2023.

## MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS OR UNIVERSITIES

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 45 incidents of military use. This is an increase compared to past years; *Education under Attack 2022*, which covered 2020 and 2021, included approximately 33 incidents.<sup>33</sup>

In 2022, the UN verified 42 cases of military use perpetrated by the Iraqi Federal Police and security forces, as well as the Peshmerga, the Popular Mobilization Forces, and the People's Defense Forces of the Kurdistan Workers' Party.<sup>34</sup> Separately, GCPEA identified two reports of military use:

- International Crisis Group and local media outlet *Shafaq News* reported that, on May 2, 2022, two Sinjar Resistance Unit snipers positioned themselves in a school in Sinjar district, Nineveh governorate. In response, the Iraqi armed forces shelled the school, killing the two snipers.<sup>35</sup>
- On March 19, 2022, Iraqi Civil Defense forces reportedly found a mass grave containing the bodies of around ten civilians near Bahaa Din School in Mosul city, Nineveh governorate. An alleged armed group had used the school in the past, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>36</sup>

In 2023, the UN reported that the military use of 22 previously occupied schools continued, while some 15 schools were vacated.<sup>37</sup> Separately, GCPEA identified at least three reports of military use in 2023. As of June 6, 2023, according to the head of the Sinjar Education Department, armed groups had occupied three schools in Sinjar district, Nineveh governorate, as reported by Human Rights Watch.<sup>38</sup> In October 2023, international and local media reported that an alleged armed group occupied a school in Sinjar city, Nineveh governorate, denying over 1,000 students access to education.<sup>39</sup> Since it was unclear whether this incident overlapped with

one of the other three schools in the same governorate, it was not included in the total number of incidents, to avoid double counting.

## ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA collected approximately 13 reports of attacks on higher education. This trend is similar to previous years; GCPEA gathered two and eight reports of attacks on higher education in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>40</sup>

In 2022, GCPEA collected approximately nine reports of attacks on higher education students and staff.<sup>41</sup> The attacks were concentrated in Sulaymaniyah city. For instance:

- On April 14, 2022, the police and security services reportedly beat and arrested professors and staff members from the University of Baghdad who were demonstrating for their right to housing at the entrance to the university and in front of the Ministry of Science and Technology building in Al-Jadriyah district, Baghdad. The police removed a female protester's hijab, as reported by Scholars at Risk and a local media outlet.<sup>42</sup>
- On October 17, 2022, police reportedly arrested at least 15 students at the University of Sulaymaniyah in Sulaymaniyah city and governorate. The students protested over dorm conditions and stipend delays, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>43</sup>
- On October 27, 2022, unidentified assailants on a motorcycle allegedly shot at the home and car of a University of Maysan professor in Amarah city, Maysan governorate. No casualties were reported by a local media outlet.<sup>44</sup>
- For several days in mid and late November 2022, police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at students demonstrating over increasing student fees and unpaid student allowances at the University of Sulaymaniyah and in Sulaymaniyah city and governorate, according to Scholars at Risk and local media sources.<sup>45</sup>

In 2023, GCPEA collected four reports of attacks on higher education students and academics:

- On January 22, 2023, an explosive device reportedly detonated at the home of a University of Maysan professor in Amarah city, Maysan governorate, damaging the house and a car. Scholars at Risk reported no casualties.<sup>46</sup>
- In March 2023, a Russian-Israeli doctoral student enrolled in Princeton University in the United States was abducted while carrying out academic research in Baghdad. Israeli officials announced that an armed group abducted her, according to Scholars at Risk and media outlet *Al-Monitor*.<sup>47</sup>
- In mid-May 2023, security forces allegedly arrested two lecturers who had organized recent protests demanding job opportunities. One was arrested in Diwaniyah city, AlQādisiyah governorate, and the other was arrested in Najaf city, Najaf governorate, according to a local media outlet.<sup>48</sup>
- In mid-May 2023, security forces also beat lecturers in Najaf city, Najaf governorate, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>49</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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