LIBYA

Attacks on education continued in Libya in 2022 and 2023, particularly in and around Tripoli. Attacks on schools declined slightly compared to the previous reporting period, while the military use of schools and attacks on higher education continued sporadically.

CONTEXT

Intermittent violence persisted in 2022 and 2023 between armed groups aligned with the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU), established by consensus through a UN-led process, and the eastern-based Government of National Stability (GNS), established by the House of Representatives and aligned with the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) armed group.[1] Despite the decline in hostilities after the UN-brokered ceasefire in October 2020, low-level violence between armed groups endured.[2] Parliamentary and presidential elections, originally set for December 2021, were indefinitely postponed amid disagreements between rival administrations over constitutional amendments and election laws, according to the UN and media reports.[3] In May and August 2022, GNS-allied armed groups clashed with armed groups aligned with the GNU near Tripoli but were unable to gain control of the capital.[4]

Violence continued throughout the reporting period.[5] In August 2022, fighting between armed groups in Tripoli killed at least 32 people, including four civilians, wounded 159 people, including civilians, and damaged critical infrastructure, according to Human Rights Watch.[6] One year later, in August 2023, renewed fighting broke out in Tripoli between armed groups based in the west of the country, resulting in 55 deaths and more than 146 civilians injured.[7] The UN reported an increase in landmine and unexploded ordnance incidents since the 2020 ceasefire;[8] such incidents killed at least 39 people in 2022, according to Amnesty International.[9]

Amid the overall decline in hostilities, there was an increase in the number of displaced people returning to their regions of origin, according to the UN.[10] However, more than 125,800 Libyans remained internally displaced as of September 2023.[11] Libya hosted more than 54,256 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Sudan, as of November 2023.[12] Armed groups and state officials committed human rights abuses against refugees and migrants, including arbitrary detentions and sexual violence, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.[13]

In September 2023, floods in eastern Libya killed over 4,300 people and left over 8,000 missing;[14] they also damaged infrastructure, particularly in northeastern Derna city, including approximately 280 schools, as reported by the UN.[15] As a result, over 43,000 people were displaced and schools were used as shelters by internally displaced persons in Derna city, although they were vacated at the beginning of the academic year. In nearby Benghazi municipality, three schools used as shelters after the flooding had not been vacated as of November 2023.[16]

More than 111,380 children required support accessing education in January 2023, according to the UN.[17] School closures and damaged infrastructure were among the main barriers for children to access learning.[18] Following militia clashes in August 2022, the University of Tripoli suspended classes and exams; the university closed again for five days after the renewed fighting in August 2023, according to news reports.[19]

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA collected at least nine reported attacks on schools in 2022 and 2023, which destroyed at least three schools. In comparison, GCPEA collected at least one reported attack in 2021 and 22 attacks in 2020, many of which occurred before the UN-brokered ceasefire in October of that year.[20] Shelling, the use of other explosive weapons, and crossfire affected schools during both reporting periods.

Between mid-2012 and mid-2022, more than 250 schools were damaged due to fighting and other causes, according to the European Commission.[21] In August and September 2022, LAAF-affiliated fighters limited the movement of civilians in Qasr Abu Hadi village, near Sirte city, forcing schools to temporarily close, according to the UN.[22]

In 2022, GCPEA identified at least eight reports of attacks on schools.[23] Separately, the UN verified four attacks on schools that year.[24] Since it was unclear how many of these attacks overlapped with reports collected by GCPEA, they were not included in the total number of attacks on schools in this report, to avoid double counting. Attacks on schools were concentrated in and around Tripoli. For instance:

- A shooting occurred near the rear entrance of the Shohada Bohdema School in Benghazi city and district, on February 1, 2022, due to a dispute between two unidentified armed groups. Classes were suspended for five days, affecting 670 students enrolled in the school, according to the Libya Education Cluster.[25]
- Security forces cleared an anti-tank landmine and explosive compounds found in a schoolyard in the Hadaba Agricultural Project, in Tripoli, on February 23, 2022, as reported by local media *Alwasat News*.[26]
- Security forces cleared an anti-personnel landmine inside Al-Hussein School in the Hadaba Agricultural Project, Tripoli, on March 3, 2022, as reported by local media *Alwasat News*.[27]
- A war remnant reportedly exploded at Noor Al-Yaqin School near Sirte city and district, on March 21, 2022. The explosion of the shell injured one student, as reported by local media.[28]
- In late August 2022, armed clashes in Tripoli reportedly damaged three secondary schools, according to local media.[29]
- On December 13, 2022, an explosive projectile landed on the roof of a school in Benghazi city and district. It did not detonate, and no casualties were recorded, according to the UN.[30]

In 2023, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a school. Between January 3 and 7, 2023, nearby armed clashes involving artillery led to the suspension of school classes in the Ujaylat area of western Sabratah city, on the border of Nuqat Al-Khams and Zawiya districts, according to the UN.[31]

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS OR UNIVERSITIES

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least one incident of the military use of a school. This is similar to previous years, during which GCPEA identified no incidents in 2021 and two reports of military use in 2020.[32]

On October 2, 2022, a mass grave containing 42 bodies was reportedly discovered at a school in Sirte city and district, as reported by international media outlet *AP News*.[33] As of February 2024, there was no confirmed information on their identities, date of burial, or cause of death.

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

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified eight attacks on higher education. Attacks also occurred sporadically in the previous reporting period; GCPEA gathered one and seven reports of attacks on higher education in 2021 and 2020, respectively.[34]

GCPEA did not collect any incidents of attacks on higher education in 2022.

In 2023, GCPEA collected eight reports of attacks on higher education:

- Around August 15, 2023, nearby armed clashes caused two universities in Tripoli, the University of Tripoli and the Africa University for Humanities & Applied Sciences, to close for several days. Deadly fighting reportedly occurred within the campus of the University of Tripoli, and at the university gate, which was also damaged by shelling, according to *University World News.* A dean interviewed by the news outlet reported that students' mental health and academic performance were negatively impacted by the clashes.[35]
- On November 16, 2023, the Internal Security Agency detained a professor who chaired a union representing university teaching staff amid a labor dispute at the University of Tripoli in Tripoli, according to Scholars at Risk.[36] Three other academics were reportedly abducted in connection with the dispute around the same time, according to local media outlet *Alwasat News.*[37]
- On November 28, 2023, an academic who participated in a labor dispute relating to university teaching staff was arrested at the University of Tripoli in Tripoli, as reported by local media.[38]
- On December 25, 2023, an academic was arrested on the University of Tripoli campus in Tripoli, as reported by local and international media outlets.[39]

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