

# THE PHILIPPINES

In 2022 and 2023, attacks on education in the Philippines were primarily concentrated on the islands of Mindanao and Masbate. As in previous years, attacks on students and educators occurred sporadically. Reports of attacks on schools increased.

## CONTEXT

Armed conflict continued in the Philippines during the reporting period particularly in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), in the south, and in the Western Visayas region in the center of the country, according to International Crisis Group and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).<sup>1</sup> The Philippines held presidential and local elections in May 2022;<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was elected to the presidency, succeeding President Rodrigo Duterte.<sup>3</sup> The new administration continued the deadly antidrug raids, and killings related to those operations continued into 2023.<sup>4</sup> During the reporting period, the government and armed forces labelled activists, journalists, and Indigenous leaders as “communist,” which led to attacks and harassment, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.<sup>5</sup>

Intermittent armed clashes between the Philippine armed forces and non-state armed groups continued during the reporting period.<sup>6</sup> Conflict between government forces and the New People’s Army (NPA) in the Western Visayas region and Mindanao displaced hundreds of civilians in 2022 and 2023.<sup>7</sup> In December 2023, fighting occurred in Mindanao between the Dawlah Islamiyah armed group and the military, according to the International Crisis Group,<sup>8</sup> and Dawlah Islamiyah and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) armed group clashed in Maguindanao del Sur and Cotabato provinces during the reporting period.<sup>9</sup> Members of Lumad and other Indigenous communities were allegedly abducted and killed by government forces, according to media reports;<sup>10</sup> they were also at risk of recruitment by armed groups.<sup>11</sup> In 2022, grave violations against children decreased in the Philippines;<sup>12</sup> the UN verified 34 grave violations that year.<sup>13</sup>

Climate-related disasters affected the Philippines during the reporting period.<sup>14</sup> In October 2022, a tropical storm led to floods and landslides that killed more than 150 people and displaced approximately one million.<sup>15</sup> According to the UN, 9.7 million children were displaced due to climate-related disasters in the Philippines in recent years.<sup>16</sup>

Limitations in education infrastructure, climate-related disasters, and violence impacted access to education for students in the Philippines. By November 2022, all public schools reopened for in-person classes after the government ended most of the remaining Covid-19 regulations in August that year, according to media reports.<sup>17</sup> However, while students learned online in 2022, they faced challenges including lack of internet and computers.<sup>18</sup> The number of schools requiring repair also remained a barrier to learning and was further exacerbated by the use of schools as shelters during climate-related disasters.<sup>19</sup> During multiple periods in 2023, schools temporarily halted in-person classes in Negros Occidental, Masbate, and Iloilo provinces due to clash-

es between the military and the NPA.<sup>20</sup>

## ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified at least 23 reported attacks on schools in 2022 and 2023. This represents an increase compared to previous years, when GCPEA collected five and three reported attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>21</sup> Several of these attacks were related to schools being used as polling stations during elections.

In 2022, the UN verified three attacks on schools and education personnel. Two of these attacks were committed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and one by the Philippines National Police.<sup>22</sup> Since it was unclear how many attacks overlapped with reports collected by GCPEA, or how many were attacks on schools rather than on education personnel, they were not included in the total number of attacks on schools for this report, to avoid double counting. Separately, GCPEA identified five attacks on schools, several of which were concentrated in BARMM and took place while schools served as polling stations for the May elections:

- On May 9, 2022, a cell phone-controlled improvised explosive device (IED) reportedly detonated near the Kabacan Pilot Elementary School, which served as a polling station in Poblacion barangay, Cotabato province. No casualties were recorded, according to the *Philippine Information Agency* and the national media outlet *Rappler*.<sup>23</sup>
- On May 9, 2022, unidentified assailants allegedly shot at voters at the Jose Abad Santos Elementary School, while the school served as a polling station in Jose Abad Santos barangay, Malabang municipality, Lanao del Sur province. One fatality was reported by national media outlet *Rappler*; it was unclear whether the school was damaged.<sup>24</sup>
- On May 9, 2022, unidentified assailants reportedly fired a grenade at Datu Piang Elementary School, while it served as a polling station in Buayan barangay, Datu Piang municipality, Maguindanao province. The grenade landed inside the school and its explosion injured six voters, as reported by the *Philippine News Agency*.<sup>25</sup>
- On May 9, 2022, unidentified assailants allegedly shot at members of the Barangay Peacekeeping Action Team, a community-led force supported by the police, while they were on duty behind Pilot Elementary School, which was being used as a polling station in Buluan town, Maguindanao province. Four casualties were reported by the national media outlet *Inquirer*; it was unclear if the school was damaged.<sup>26</sup>
- Security forces found explosive devices and bomb-making materials at a school in Parangbasak barangay in Lamitan city, Basilan province on September 8, 2022, according to a military official as reported by the *Philippine News Agency*. The military reportedly conducted a controlled disposal of the explosive materials.<sup>27</sup>

In 2023, GCPEA identified 18 reports of attacks on schools, several of which took place while schools served as polling stations for elections in October.<sup>28</sup> The UN reported that the proximity of armed conflict incidents to schools resulted in class suspensions in the provinces of Masbate, Quezon, Rizal, and Iloilo in 2023; these incidents were included in the total number of attacks on schools.<sup>29</sup> Separately, the UN reported two attacks on schools and two threats of attacks against schools in 2023;<sup>30</sup> since it was unclear whether these attacks over-

lapped with the other incidents, they were not included in the total number of attacks on schools, to avoid double counting. For example:

- On March 9, 2023, an explosive device reportedly detonated near Gawaan Elementary School in Gawaan town, Kalinga municipality, Cordillera Administrative region, while afternoon classes were in session. A village chief interviewed by a local news outlet reported that, because of the explosion, the school was closed for three days and students' mental health was negatively impacted.<sup>31</sup>
- Clashes between military forces and a non-state armed group occurred near at least five schools in Cawayan, Placer, and Dimasalang municipalities, Masbate province, on March 20 and 22, 2023, according to International Crisis Group and local media outlets. The clashes took place near Villahermosa National High School, Tomas V. Rivera Memorial High School, Locso-an Elementary School, Arriesgado-Sevellino National High School, and another educational facility. In one case, the classes at Villahermosa National High School were in session during the clash and bullets hit the school.<sup>32</sup> In-person classes were suspended in many schools in the province, with students moving to distance learning lessons, affecting 112 schools with 31,764 students.<sup>33</sup>
- On April 25, 2023, clashes between alleged armed groups reportedly occurred near at least two schools, including Saint Francis School in Dapiawan barangay, Datu Saudi-Ampatuan municipality, Maguindanao province. Bullets and shelling significantly damaged the schools' roofs and walls, according to a regional media outlet.<sup>34</sup>
- On October 28, 2023, alleged armed group members shot at election officials and a soldier while they were on duty near Dinawacan Elementary School, which was in use as a polling station, in Dinawacan village, Calbayog city, Samar province, as reported by the *Philippine News Agency*.<sup>35</sup>
- Unidentified assailants reportedly fired grenade projectiles at Simuay Junction Elementary School, while it served as a polling station on October 30, 2023, in Simuay barangay, Sultan Kudarat municipality, Maguindanao del Norte province. Shrapnel from the blast injured three community members and a soldier who was overseeing voting activities, as reported by local media outlet *Philippine Star*.<sup>36</sup>

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

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected at least six reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA collected at least one and four reported attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>37</sup>

In 2022, GCPEA identified at least one report of an attack on education personnel. On February 24, 2022, at least two teachers from the Indigenous Lumad group were accused of being NPA militants and were allegedly killed in a military operation in Andap barangay, New Bataan municipality, Davao de Oro province, as reported by the national media outlet *Inquirer*.<sup>38</sup> In 2023, GCPEA identified five reports of attacks on school students and education personnel:

- An activist who worked as a coordinator for the Alliance of Concerned Teachers was abducted along with their spouse for six days in Cebu City, Cebu province, on January 10, 2023. The couple, who were returning

from holiday travel, recounted facing emotional and psychological torture, as reported by Amnesty International and the national media outlet *Inquirer*.<sup>39</sup>

- A former Lumad teacher was allegedly accused of being an NPA militant and shot and killed in a military operation in Lemulan village in Kalamansig municipality, Sultan Kudarat province, on July 27, 2023, as reported by national media outlet *Rappler*.<sup>40</sup> Save Our Schools Network reported that the former teacher was targeted for his role as an educator.<sup>41</sup>
- On November 29, 2023, unidentified assailants reportedly shot and killed a student at Datu Dalandag National High School in Ginatilan village, Pikit town, Cotabato province. Classes at the school were suspended as a result, as reported by national media outlet *Rappler*. The student was also a member of the Civilian Auxiliary Forces Geographical Unit under the Army.<sup>42</sup>
- In 2023, the UN verified that the safety of students in two schools was under threat after allegations that they were linked to the NPA by the government while conducting anti-insurgency lectures.<sup>43</sup>

## MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS OR UNIVERSITIES

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least one incident involving the military use of a school. In comparison, no such incidents were identified in the previous reporting period.<sup>44</sup> In the period spanning 2017 through 2019, however, GCPEA collected at least 30 reports of military use of schools,<sup>45</sup> showing a significant decline over time.

On April 25, 2023, an alleged armed group reportedly used Padre Pio Day Care Center as a fighting position during clashes with a rival armed group in Dapiawan barangay, Datu Saudi-Ampatuan municipality, Maguindanao province. Students were not present at the time of the military use, according to the school's principal who was interviewed by an international media outlet.<sup>46</sup>

## ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, attacks on higher education occurred sporadically. This trend is similar to previous years; GCPEA gathered two reports of attacks on higher education during the 2020-2021 reporting period.<sup>47</sup>

In 2022, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on higher education. On November 5, 2022, security forces found and defused two IEDs near the Mindanao State University campus in Datu Odin Sinsuat town, Maguindanao del Norte province, as reported by national media outlet *The Philippine Star*.<sup>48</sup>

The following year, on December 3, Dawlah Islamiyah militants reportedly detonated an explosive device during a Catholic mass in the gymnasium of Mindanao State University, Marawi, in Marawi city, Lanao del Sur province. Four people were killed and more than 40 people were injured, according to International Crisis Group and Scholars at Risk.<sup>49</sup> The floor of the gymnasium was reportedly damaged, and classes were suspended.<sup>50</sup>

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