

SOUTH SUDAN

Fighting continued in South Sudan during the reporting period, despite the signing of peace accords in 2018. Attacks on, and military use of, schools increased in 2022 and 2023 compared to previous years. GCPEA also identified a report of sexual violence along a school route and two reports of attacks on higher education.

CONTEXT

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, conflict and intercommunal violence continued in South Sudan, particularly in Warrap, Upper Nile, Unity, and Central Equatoria states.¹ In August 2022, the South Sudanese government and main armed opposition group, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), alongside three other political groups, extended the timeline of the transitional government established in 2020 by two years. Formed under the 2018 peace accords, the transitional government had been set to conclude in February 2023.² In early 2022, President Salva Kiir signed peace accords with a splinter group of SPLM/A-IO, Kitgwang, unifying Kitgwang fighters into the national army, according to International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch.³ In March 2022, SPLM/A-IO halted engagement in parts of the 2018 peace deal due to alleged government-led attacks, leading violence to increase before both parties recommitted to the deal the following month.⁴ Peace talks between the government and non-signatory armed groups to the 2018 peace accords halted in 2022 when the government withdrew; discussions resumed in 2023, but progress remained stalled by the end of that year, as reported by a local media outlet.⁵

Armed groups continued to attack civilians and commit human rights abuses during the reporting period.⁶ The number of civilians impacted by violence increased in 2022, with more than 3,460 victims and survivors, despite a decrease in violent incidents committed by parties to the conflict that year, according to the UN.⁷ In August 2022, conflict broke out between SPLM/A-IO splinter groups, Kitgwang and Agwelek, in Upper Nile state, displacing thousands of civilians.⁸ Fighting also continued between the government and the National Salvation Front (NAS), a non-signatory to the peace agreement, in Equatoria region, and both parties committed human rights abuses including sexual violence, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.⁹ Intercommunal violence also persisted during the reporting period.¹⁰ The UN reported that more than 60 percent of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2022 were a result of such violence.¹¹

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan continued to deteriorate during the reporting period.¹² In 2023, the UN reported that nine million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, with children comprising more than half.¹³ Armed groups attacked aid operations, inhibiting access to humanitarian relief for civilians across the country.¹⁴ Approximately 2.2 million civilians were internally displaced in 2023;¹⁵ in addition, South Sudan received an influx of more than 450,000 civilians from the 2023 conflict in Sudan, including many returning South Sudanese refugees, according to the UN.¹⁶

Conflict continued to impact children's access to education during the reporting period, disproportionately affecting girls.¹⁷ School fees and lack of trained teachers were additional barriers to education.¹⁸ Approximately 2.8 million children and adolescents were out of school in 2023; girls faced additional risks while out of classes, including early marriage, according to the UN.¹⁹ In February 2023, President Salva Kiir announced the expansion of free education to include secondary in addition to primary school.²⁰

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 51 attacks on schools. This represents a significant increase compared to previous years, when GCPEA collected eight and three such attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.²¹

In 2022, the UN reported 51 attacks on schools in South Sudan.²² Separately, GCPEA identified five reported attacks on schools from news and UN reports, some of which may overlap with the UN-reported incidents. Examples of attacks included:

- In 2022, Gumuruk Boys and Gumuruk Girls primary schools in Gumuruk county, Greater Pibor Administrative Area, were burned down. As a result, access to education for over 500 students was affected.²³
- In June 2022, South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) soldiers looted a primary school in Yei county, Central Equatoria state, destroying the school fence and stealing a power generator and parts of the roof, according to the UN.²⁴
- Amid fighting between rival armed groups, two schools were reportedly burned down in New Fangak town, Jonglei state, on August 20, 2022, according to the UN and a local media outlet.²⁵

GCPEA did not identify any attacks on schools in 2023.

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected approximately eight reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA collected no reports of attacks on students and education personnel in 2021 and 2020.²⁶

GCPEA identified five reports of attacks on education personnel in 2022:

- Security forces beat teachers who were demonstrating over withheld salaries in Bor town, Jonglei state, on February 9, 2022, as reported by local media.²⁷
- Around February 9, 2022, security forces arrested a teachers' union chairperson in Bor town, Jonglei state, as reported by a local media outlet.²⁸
- On June 20 and June 22, 2022, security forces arrested 12 and 21 teachers, respectively, who were demonstrating over withheld salaries in Rumbek town, Lakes state, as reported by local media outlets.²⁹

- On August 12, 2022, police arrested a teachers' union chairperson, who was also arrested on February 9, as detailed above, in front of the education ministry in Bor town, Jonglei state, where he was leading a peaceful protest over withheld salaries, as reported by local media outlets.³⁰

GCPEA identified three reports of attacks on students and education personnel in 2023:

- Six students, two girls and four boys, were abducted and killed while in transit to take primary school mock examinations in Kuinam village, Unity state, on February 3, 2023, as reported by a local media outlet.³¹
- In June 2023, over 15 teachers were detained by police in Lakes state after they protested an exercise to screen teacher quality by the Ministry of Education.³²
- The Education Director of Nagero county was fatally shot at his house in Nagero town, Western Equatoria state, on September 9, 2023, as reported by a local media outlet.³³

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA identified over 30 instances of the military use of schools. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2022*, which covers 2021 and 2020, included at least ten reports of military use.³⁴

The UN verified the use of 24 schools by SSPDF and other parties to the armed conflict in 2022.³⁵ Separately, GCPEA identified four reported incidents of military use from news and UN reports, some of which may overlap with the UN-verified incidents. Examples of incidents included:

- The UN reported that the SSPDF occupied three schools in the Agok area of Abyei region in 2022 up to at least October of that year.³⁶
- In 2022, Manyabol primary school in Greater Pibor Administrative Area was used as a camping shelter for armed group fighters, resulting in damaged school property and restricted access to education for students.³⁷

In 2023, the UN reported the military use of seven schools, and that six previously occupied schools were vacated.³⁸

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

GCPEA identified one report of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school during the 2022-2023 reporting period. During the period covered by *Education under Attack 2022*, GCPEA did not receive any such reports.³⁹

In Yambio county, a SPLM/A-IO soldier attempted to rape a young girl while she was on her way to school, as reported by her mother, according to the UN.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

In 2022, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on higher education. On March 1, 2022, police arrested three students who were demonstrating against university exam policies at Dr. John Garang Memorial University of Science and Technology in Bor town, Jonglei state, as reported by a local media outlet.⁴²

In 2023, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on higher education. On August 16, 2023, after two days of student protests over tuition increases, police reportedly raided a hostel for female students at the University of Bahr el Ghazal in Wau city, Western Bahr el Ghazal state, and detained some students. According to students interviewed by a local media outlet, police stood, armed with guns, at the campus gate.⁴³

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