COUNTRY PROFILES EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK 2024

# SUDAN

Attacks on schools and universities, as well as their use for military purposes, increased during the reporting period, in particular after conflict erupted in April 2023. In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA identified reports of at least 62 attacks on schools and at least 28 attacks on higher education, as well as an incident of sexual violence at a university.

#### CONTEXT

During the reporting period, Sudan continued to experience political unrest in 2022, followed by armed conflict in 2023.¹ In 2022, protests demanding a civilian democratic transition continued, following the October 2021 military coup.² Police used tear gas and live ammunition against protesters on numerous occasions in 2022, killing and injuring civilians in Khartoum, according to Human Rights Watch and news reports.³ In April 2023, fighting broke out in Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.⁴ Fighting spread to other parts of the country, including the Darfur region.⁵ Parties to the conflict agreed to various ceasefires throughout 2023, but fighting broke out following each of the agreements.6

Both parties used explosive weapons in the conflict, which killed civilians and damaged infrastructure, including hospitals and homes, according to Human Rights Watch and the Explosive Weapons Monitor.<sup>7</sup> The violence forced hundreds of thousands, including children, to flee, as well as trapping others in areas of fighting.<sup>8</sup> Students were trapped at the University of Khartoum for more than three days at the outset of fighting;<sup>9</sup> several months later, at least one million people continued to be trapped in Khartoum and neighboring cities.<sup>10</sup> In December 2023, ACLED reported at least 12,000 people had been killed in the conflict since April of that vear.<sup>11</sup>

Violence also continued in the Darfur region in 2022, further escalating in 2023 after the outbreak of hostilities in the capital, with West Darfur the epicenter of multiple large-scale attacks against civilians. <sup>12</sup> In June 2022, armed clashes in the town of Kulbus and nearby areas in West Darfur state killed at least 125 people, including five children, according to Human Rights Watch and the UN. <sup>13</sup> During the first half of 2022, violence displaced more than 75,000 civilians in North, South, and West Darfur and South Kordofan states in addition to 11,000 refugees who fled to Chad. <sup>14</sup> In June 2023, RSF forces abducted and killed the Governor of West Darfur state, according to Amnesty International and news reports. <sup>15</sup>

The UN reported that 24.8 million civilians, nearly half of them children, needed humanitarian assistance at the end of 2023.<sup>16</sup> Sudan had approximately 7.1 million internally displaced people, with over 5.8 million people newly displaced from April 2023, according to the UN.<sup>17</sup>

Natural disasters and violence continued to impact education during the 2022-2023 reporting period. More than 400 schools were closed in 2022 due to floods, impacting at least 138,000 students. Following the

outbreak of hostilities in 2023, the number of children out of school more than doubled from approximately 6.9 million in 2022 to approximately 19 million at the end of 2023, according to the UN.<sup>19</sup> In April 2023, all schools in Sudan closed as a result of the escalating violence;<sup>20</sup> internally displaced people including children subsequently used schools as shelters, according to the UN and media reports.<sup>21</sup> In 12 states that were less affected by the conflict, schools reopened in May 2023.<sup>22</sup> Universities in Khartoum closed in April 2023, after which many students fled the country.<sup>23</sup>

### **ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS**

GCPEA identified at least 62 reported attacks on schools in 2022 and 2023. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2022*, which covered 2020 and 2021, included at least ten reports of attacks on schools.<sup>24</sup>

In 2022, the UN verified 22 attacks on schools, the majority of which were carried out by unidentified perpetrators.<sup>25</sup>

In 2023, GCPEA identified 40 reports of attacks on schools, almost all of which occurred after the armed conflict broke out on April 15.<sup>26</sup> Separately, the UN reported that 52 schools were damaged, looted, or occupied in Darfur between mid-April and October 2023.<sup>27</sup> However, it remained unclear how many of the schools were damaged by parties to the conflict rather than by other causes, and how many were attacks rather than occupied, so the number is not included in the count of attacks on schools here. Examples of incidents GCPEA collected included:

- On April 15, 2023, armed clashes occurred near the Comboni School near the presidential palace in Khartoum, trapping 300 students inside, as well as teachers, as reported by Insecurity Insight and the media outlet Middle East Eye.<sup>28</sup>
- In late April 2023, the Ministry of Education offices in Nyala city, South Darfur, were vandalized and looted, according to the Acting Minister of Education and Instruction, as reported by *Sudan News Agency* and other media outlets. Exams and exam equipment were burned, and the ministry's bookstore and vehicles looted.<sup>29</sup>
- Around May 15, 2023, stray bullets and shrapnel from nearby armed clashes hit a boys' school in El Geneina, West Darfur, killing or injuring some of the displaced people sheltering inside, according to Amnesty
  International.<sup>30</sup>
- On August 7, 2023, a student dormitory in El Obeid city, North Kordofan, was raided and students were beaten and robbed at gunpoint, as reported by Insecurity Insight and a local media outlet.<sup>31</sup>
- Armed clashes occurred near the El Fasher secondary school in El Fasher city, North Darfur, on September 9, 2023, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>32</sup>
- On November 1, 2023, shelling hit a boys' secondary school in Ardamata, a suburb of El Geneina city in West Darfur, killing or injuring some of the displaced people sheltering inside classrooms, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>33</sup>

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

In 2022 and 2023, GCPEA collected four reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA collected approximately six reported attacks during the 2020-2021 reporting period.<sup>34</sup>

In 2022, GCPEA identified three reports of attacks on education personnel:

- On March 14, 2022, police used teargas before entering Nyala Secondary School in Nyala city, South Darfur, then allegedly beat and arrested the school's director, deputy director, and several teachers, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>35</sup>
- On March 14, 2022, security forces used teargas on students and striking teachers at Zat Alnitagain girls' primary school in Atbara city, River Nile state, as reported by a regional media outlet. The teachers were reportedly on strike for increased wages.<sup>36</sup>
- On November 2, 2022, police used teargas to disperse students who were protesting tuition increases in El Fasher city, North Darfur, as reported by local news outlet *Darfur 24*.<sup>37</sup>

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least one report of an attack on school students and personnel. On September 22, 2023, state intelligence service officers arrested the spokesman of the Sudanese Teachers' Committee in Port Sudan city, Red Sea state, in addition to two other committee members, as reported by local media outlet *Sudan Tribune*.<sup>38</sup>

#### MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 28 incidents involving the military use of schools. In comparison, GCPEA collected approximately three and eight reported incidents involving military use in 2021 and 2020, respectively.<sup>39</sup>

In 2022, the UN verified 11 instances of the military use of schools by the RSF, Justice and Equality Movement, Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid, and unknown perpetrators.<sup>40</sup> Separately, GCPEA collected one report from the UN, in which security forces occupied a school in Kafani village, West Darfur, in June 2022.<sup>41</sup> Since it was unclear whether this individual attack overlapped with the UN count, it was not included in the total number of instances of military use for this report, to avoid double counting.

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least 17 incidents involving the military use of schools and universities.<sup>42</sup> For instance:

- The Protection Cluster reported that, in the period between April 15 and June 20, 2023, armed parties occupied four schools in North Darfur.<sup>43</sup>
- Around May 18, 2023, RSF fighters used Khalid Bin Walid High School to hide in Nyala city, South Darfur, according to Amnesty International. The school was subsequently attacked by SAF combatants.<sup>44</sup>

- An alleged armed group used the Omdurman Islamic University as a base in Omdurman city, Khartoum state, on July 3, 2023. A rival armed force subsequently attacked the armed group, resulting in clashes at the university, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>45</sup>
- An alleged armed group used the University of Medical Sciences and Technology in Khartoum as a barracks in mid-2023, as reported by University World News.<sup>46</sup>
- On September 26, 2023, a school was used as a firing position for shelling opponents during armed clashes between the RSF and the SAF near Hasahisa camp, Central Darfur, as reported by the UN.<sup>47</sup>
- On November 6, 2023, the UN reported the ongoing military use of schools in Abyei.<sup>48</sup>

## 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 or university during the 2022-2023 reporting period. During the period covered by *Education under Attack* 2022, GCPEA did not receive any such reports.<sup>49</sup>

On May 14, 2023, alleged armed group fighters raided a dormitory for teaching staff at the Ahfad University for Women, took two women to another building, and raped them, according to a legal activist group as reported by *University World News.*<sup>50</sup>

### ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

GCPEA identified at least 28 reported attacks on higher education during the 2022-2023 reporting period. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2022*, which covered 2020 and 2021, included three reports of attacks on higher education.<sup>51</sup>

In 2022, GCPEA identified four reported attacks on higher education, all of which involved students or personnel.<sup>52</sup> For instance:

- On March 14, 2022, the leader of the Omdurman locality branch of the Sudanese Teachers Committee was arrested and detained at his house in Omdurman city, Khartoum state, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>53</sup>
- On July 28, 2022, security forces hit medical students with batons at Elsheikh Abdallah Elbadri University in Berber town, River Nile state, when they tried to enter the campus to start a sit-in protest over academic complaints, as reported by Scholars at Risk.<sup>54</sup>
- On August 22, 2022, police assaulted and threw teargas at university students who staged a protest in Al Gedaref city, Gedaref state, over poor living conditions at their dormitory, as reported by a local media outlet.<sup>55</sup>

In 2023, GCPEA identified 24 reported attacks on higher education, of which the majority involved attacks on infrastructure rather than students or staff.<sup>56</sup> Separately, ACAPS and *University World News* reported that

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105 higher education facilities had been damaged or vandalized since the outbreak of fighting in April that year, including private and public universities and the National Fund for Student Welfare.<sup>57</sup> However, this number was not included in the total number of attacks on higher education since it was unclear how many of the incidents met GCPEA's definition of an attack on education. Examples of attacks collected by GCPEA included:

- On April 17, 2023, an airstrike hit the Jabra Scientific College for Islamic Studies campus in Khartoum, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>58</sup>
- On April 17, 2023, a student was shot near the University of Khartoum in Khartoum, as reported by *University World News*.<sup>59</sup>
- In May 2023, unidentified assailants burned the offices of the presidency of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Khartoum, as reported by *University World News*.<sup>60</sup>
- On May 28, 2023, the UN reported that the University of Zalingei in Zalingei city, Central Darfur, was looted.<sup>61</sup>
- On June 4, 2023, an airstrike hit the International University of Africa in Khartoum, as reported by Scholars at Risk and international media outlets *BBC* and *Voice of America*.<sup>62</sup>
- On June 6, 2023, several shells hit the El Geneina University female dormitory compound and its vicinity in El Geneina, West Darfur, according to Amnesty International. Shrapnel from the shelling left one woman blind in one eye and injured another woman in the abdomen.<sup>63</sup>
- On September 13, 2023, an airstrike hit the area around Nyala University in Nyala city, South Darfur, as reported by the local media outlet *Sudan Tribune*.<sup>64</sup>

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