MALI

Hundreds of schools in the central and northern parts of Mali were closed, many because school personnel had fled out of fear because of attacks. Other schools were directly attacked or collaterally damaged during fighting between armed groups. Armed groups—including those linked to extremist groups—national forces, and peacekeeping forces reportedly used schools for military purposes, and non-state armed groups indoctrinated and recruited children at schools.

Context

Mali's most recent armed conflict began in early 2012, when Tuareg separatists from the Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) and extremist groups occupied Mali's northern regions.[1378] Later in the year, a military junta ousted the democratically elected president, accusing him of not doing enough to quell the armed rebellion, leading to lawlessness and insecurity throughout much of the country.[1379]

A French-led military intervention in early 2013 largely cleared the non-state armed groups, many of which were allied with al Qaeda, that had gained control over the northern regions of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal in 2012.[1380] However, the MNLA continued to control much of the Kidal region.[1381] In addition, the presence of armed groups affiliated with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), such as Ansar Dine, continued and, beginning in 2015, spread into the Mopti and Ségou regions of central Mali.[1382]

Despite a peace agreement signed in June 2015 that was designed to reestablish state control over the north, general lawlessness and attacks by state-affiliated and non-state armed groups undermined stability and the restoration of state authority in the north. After 2015 violence spread into the central regions, where security has worsened, including the assassination of officials, intercommunal conflicts, and attacks against the security forces.[1383]

In total, 657 schools were closed as of December 31, 2017, which represented 14 percent of all schools in Mali.[1384] According to OCHA, central Mali was particularly affected. In December 2017, 277 schools were closed in the Mopti region.[1385] Threats against teachers and students and a lack of security were reported to be two of the primary reasons for school closures. According to UNICEF, around the end of 2015 nearly 600 teachers had fled the conflict areas or stopped working because of general insecurity.[1386] OCHA reported in December 2017 that 2,700 teachers were not in their posts because of a lack of security and threats from extremist groups who opposed education.[1387] A Sahel-focused news site reported in June 2017 that insecurity had closed many schools for three or four years.[1388]

According to CEDAW, the conflict disproportionately harmed girls' access to education and helped worsen the overall situation of women and girls.[1389] UN agencies reported that, during the conflict in the north, armed groups perpetrated gender-based violence ranging from enforced dress codes to rape, and the perceived threat of this violence led some parents to keep their daughters home from school.[1390]

Attacks on education were most common in Mali in 2012, before the start of the current reporting period, and in early 2013. They intensified again beginning in 2015, with increased insecurity in the central regions.

Mali endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in February 2018.

Attacks on schools

Schools in northern and central Mali suffered damage from looting and fighting throughout the current reporting period. During their occupation of the north, armed groups damaged and destroyed more than 100 schools, according to reports by UN agencies, NGOs, and the media. The conflict caused school closures in Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu regions, according to the US State Department.[1391] Additionally, fighting during the 2013 French-led intervention in Mali caused collateral damage to several schools. Armed groups continued to attack schools throughout the reporting period, although documented rates of attack were generally lower than in *Education under Attack 2014*.

The Education Cluster reported in March 2013 that armed forces and armed groups had occupied, looted, or destroyed 130 schools since the conflict began in 2012, and that many schools in the north had closed as a result of the fighting and the flight of school personnel due to insecurity.[1392] During the second half of 2013, explosives, including those left in schools, injured at least 77 children in the towns of Tessalit, Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao, according to UNICEF.[1393]

Explosives also caused collateral damage to schools in 2013. For example, according to information collected by the UN independent expert on human rights in Mali, on December 14, 2013, an unknown perpetrator used a vehicle loaded with explosives to launch an attack on a UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) vehicle parked in front of a bank in Kidal. The bank and a school across from it sustained heavy damage.[1394]

Insecurity in the north continued to damage schools sporadically in 2014, even after the security situation improved. The UN verified one attack on a school in Gao region in 2014.[1395] However, the violence appeared to be most acute in Kidal region, where Tuareg groups continued to occupy Kidal town. After a brief outbreak of violence in Kidal, seven schools closed, preventing 772 children from completing the 2013-2014 academic year.[1396] Examples of attacks on schools in Kidal region included the following:

- According to local media, on April 7, 2014, unidentified assailants fired rockets at a school in Kidal town, Kidal region.[1397]

- UNICEF reported that on June 30, 2014, unknown assailants used a car bomb to target the same bank in Kidal that was attacked in December 2013 and once again damaged the school next to it. The explosion seriously damaged the school fence, but no students or teachers were killed or injured.[1398]

During the second half of the reporting period, violence affecting education spread to central Mali, causing several hundred schools to close in the north and center of the country.[1399] In 2015 and 2016, reported attacks included the following:

- The UN verified four attacks on schools and protected persons in 2015, including two by non-state armed groups.[1400]

- The UN verified six attacks or threats against schools and protected persons in Ménaka, Mopti, and Timbuktu in the center and north of the country in 2016.[1401]

In 2017, attacks against schools appeared to intensify. The UN verified 41 attacks against schools and protected personnel in Gao, Mopti, Timbuktu, and Kidal regions, but did not share disaggregated information. According to the UN, the alleged perpetrators of these attacks were armed men identified as members of extremist groups.[1402] Examples of attacks on schools identified by GCPEA included two in Ndodjiga commune, Mopti region:

- A Sahel-focused news site alleged that on May 24, 2017, in Sah village, Ndodjiga commune, young armed men attacked two schools with heavy fire and ransacked them.[1403]

- Around the same time, local officials alleged that armed extremists who opposed Western schools attacked, burned, and sacked a French-language school in an unspecified location. The identities of the perpetrators were unverified.[1404]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Armed groups occasionally targeted school directors, teachers, and students. These types of attacks were not documented in *Education under Attack 2014*. According to the UN, attacks and threats against students, parents, and education personnel were common in 2016, especially in the Mopti region, although precise statistics were unspecified.[1405]

Among the anecdotal examples that GCPEA was able to identify were two attacks on teachers:

- At an unspecified time in 2015, le Front de libération du Macina, an affiliate of Ansar Dine, demanded that the village leader in Dogo village, Mopti region, close secular schools. When the village leader sought authorities' support, the group killed him. The group then threatened teachers in six local communes, which led to the closure of 93 schools.[1406]

- On July 11, 2016, armed actors who were reportedly opposed to Western education and the government of Mali killed a school director.[1407]

Military use of schools

Military use of schools continued throughout the reporting period. From 2014 to 2015, the UN reported the military use of schools by the MNLA, l'Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad (HCUA), le Mouvement arabe de l'Azawad (MAA), la Coalition du people de l'Azawad, le Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest, Ansar Dine, and MINUSMA peacekeepers.[1408] Armed parties reportedly continued to occupy schools even after signing the 2015 peace agreement.[1409] According to an international agency working in Mali, the presence of armed actors near schools was common but poorly documented.[1410]

During 2013, there were anecdotal reports that armed forces, non-state armed groups, and peacekeepers occupied schools, sometimes resulting in attacks on educational institutions. For example:

·   During the first half of 2013, according to various sources, several schools that were allegedly being used by armed groups were damaged by French aerial bombardments, one in Bourem, one in Douentza, one in Timbuktu, and at least one other in Diabaly.[1411]

·   According to the UN, most schools were vacated after the French-led military intervention, but as of November 2013, 30 members of the MNLA had established a military post inside the Lycée Attaher Af Ily high school in Kidal and were using two buildings and the hangar of the school.[1412]

·   According to the UN, MINUSMA occupied a vocational training center from 2013 until December 2014.[1413]

The UN verified 20 instances of military use of schools in 2014, mainly attributed to the MNLA, HCUA, MAA, and la Coalition du People de l'Azawad. Nearly 60 percent of the schools used were in Gao region; the others were in Kidal, Timbuktu, and Mopti regions.[1414] Also according to the UN, MINUSMA peacekeepers used three schools during 2014: in Gao city. Ansongo Cercle, a subdivision of Gao region, and Tabankort, Kidal region.[1415]

Between 15 and 16 schools were reportedly used for military purposes in 2015, with responsibility attributed to the non-state armed groups, the national army, and MINUSMA. For example:

·   According to the Education Cluster, armed actors, including the Malian army and MINUSMA, occupied at least 16 school buildings in 2015.[1416]

·   The UN also verified that armed groups used nine schools between March 27 and June 11, 2015, and it noted that it had received unverified reports of military use in six other schools.[1417]

·   In December 2015, the UN noted that armed groups that had signed the peace agreement were occupying seven schools in Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu regions.[1418]

Armed groups used at least 14 schools in Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu regions in 2016, according to the UN. The UN noted that the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) and CMA/Haut Conseil pour l'unité de l'Azawad vacated two of these schools that year.[1419] According to the UN, seven schools in these regions were occupied by armed groups that were signatories to the June 2015 peace agreement.[1420]

The UN documented the use of 12 schools by armed groups as of December 31, 2017. These included four schools used by the CMA and two by Platform, a pro-government militia. Schools occupied by armed groups were located in Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal regions.[1421] At least one school formerly used by Mali's armed forces was vacated in 2017. Information from the Education Cluster indicated that, in January 2017, the military was occupying one functional school in Ménaka, Gao region, at night when school was not in session.[1422] The UN verified that the military vacated this school in early 2017.[1423]

Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school

As recorded in *Education under Attack 2014,* the UN verified that armed groups used an unspecified number of schools as locations in which to indoctrinate and train children in 2012 and 2013.[1424] According to the UN, armed groups continued to recruit school children frequently in Islamic schools in 2013. Families requested that their children be recruited so they would receive a religious education and be protected from other armed groups.[1425] From January 2012 to December 2013, witnesses told the UN about instances in which parents in Gao city were paid to send their children to religious schools, where they received weapons training and extremist instruction.[1426] By the end of 2013, following the

French-led intervention which drove the armed groups out of most major towns and cities in the north, the UN reported that it was believed that most children had decided to return to their families.[1427]

Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school

At least one case of sexual violence was perpetrated by armed parties in the education context.

In 2013, a female teacher in northern Mali told UNESCO that her 16-year-old female student was gang-raped by three members of an extremist group on her way to school on an unspecified date.[1428] Although sexual violence was not documented in Mali in *Education under Attack 2014* and only one report was found during the 2013-2017 period, it may have been underreported in both periods, given the context in which armed groups engaged in sexual and gender-based violence in the north, according to Human Rights Watch and the UN.[1429]

Attacks on higher education

At least one attack on higher education occurred in Mali during the 2013-2017 reporting period, whereas no such attacks were reported from 2009 through the first half of 2013.

Scholars at Risk and the US Department of State reported that police forces used teargas against a peaceful student sit-in at the University of Bamako on July 9, 2013. According to these reports, the police and effects of the teargas forced students away from the campus. Police also reportedly beat several students. Scholars at Risk documented injuries to at least 37 students. The protest took place against the backdrop of a teachers' union announcement to go on an indefinite strike after university officials failed to honor an agreement to raise salaries. The strike led to the suspension of classes, and the students began their protest to prompt negotiations between university authorities and the teachers' union.[1430]

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[1384] Information shared by a UN respondent, February 22, 2018.

[1385] OCHA, "Mali Humanitarian Brief," December 2017, p. 2.

[1386] "Help 'can't come soon enough' for thousands of children out of school in northern Mali-UNICEF," UNICEF news release, December 18, 2015. Information provided by Human Rights Watch researcher on January 27, 2017.

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[1388] "In the center of Mali, the extremists proclaim school 'haram'"haram," Sahelien, June 7, 2017.

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2013," as cited in GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2014*, p. 158.

[1393] HRC, "Report of the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, Suliman Baldo," A/HRC/25/72, January 10, 2014, para. 70.

[1394] HRC, "Report in Mali, Suliman Baldo," para. 20.

[1395] UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," A/69/926-S/2015/409, para. 128.

[1396] US State Department et al., "Country Reports 2014: Mali," p. 23.

[1397] *AFP,* "Militants launch failed rocket attack in northern Mali," *Africatime*, April 7, 2014.

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[1400] UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," A/70/836-S/2016/360, April 20, 2016, para. 97.

[1401] UN Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General," A/72/361-S/2017/821, para. 116.

[1402] Information shared by a UN respondent, February 22, 2018.

[1403] "In the center of Mali."

1404 Information shared by a UN respondent via email on September 19, 2017.

1405 UN Secretary-General, "Report of the Secretary-General," A/72/361-S/2017/821, para. 116.

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1425 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali," S/2013/582, October 1, 2013, para. 45.

1426 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," S/2014/267, para. 46.

1427 UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General," S/2014/267, para. 41.

1428 "'I rescued the textbooks.'"

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