

## MYANMAR

***Attacks on schools and universities, as well as the military use of educational facilities, significantly increased during the reporting period, in particular following a military coup in February 2021. In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified reports of over 200 attacks on schools by state armed forces and non-state armed groups, as well as over 220 cases of military use of education facilities.***

### Context

Political violence and insecurity increased in Myanmar during the 2020-2021 reporting period. Myanmar's military (Tatmadaw) overthrew the civilian government on February 1, 2021 and declared a yearlong state of emergency,<sup>1088</sup> which was later extended for an additional six months.<sup>1089</sup> In response, millions of people in Myanmar participated in anti-coup protests and general strikes, known as the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).<sup>1090</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, security forces used excessive and lethal force to disperse demonstrations, killing over 900 protesters, including at least 75 children, and arrested several thousand people between February and July 2021.<sup>1091</sup> Teachers, students and university faculty who actively participated in the CDM were particularly targeted.<sup>1092</sup> Human Rights Watch documented widespread and systematic abuses, including murder, enforced disappearance, torture, rape and other sexual violence, and severe deprivation of liberty.<sup>1093</sup>

Political upheaval also affected the dynamics of ongoing conflicts between the Tatmadaw and non-state armed groups, some of which had significantly reduced in late 2020.<sup>1094</sup> In 2021, ACLED found that, following the coup, certain groups, such as the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA), supported anti-coup protesters and escalated their activities, whereas violence between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine state remained low.<sup>1095</sup> The Tatmadaw also reportedly increased their attacks on civilians, while unidentified armed groups and local self-defense groups perpetrated attacks including bombings and targeted killings of civil servants working for the junta.<sup>1096</sup>

Conflict and political violence further constrained the humanitarian situation. Between February 1 and December 1, 2021, the number of people internally displaced in Myanmar nearly doubled, to 666,000, and another 25,000 people sought asylum in neighboring countries, according to the UN.<sup>1097</sup> In December 2021, the UN reported that 14.4 million people, including 5 million children, were in need of humanitarian aid, an increase of more than 12 million since February 1, 2021.<sup>1098</sup> The military junta's restrictions on movement and aid access compounded the existing humanitarian needs.<sup>1099</sup>

Both the Covid-19 pandemic and violence hindered children's access to education in Myanmar throughout 2020 and 2021. School closures due to Covid-19 containment measures affected 12 million school-aged children from March 2020<sup>1100</sup> through May 2021.<sup>1101</sup> However, only a quarter of school-aged children reportedly returned to school in June 2021, due to insecurity, attacks on schools, and the dismissal of teachers.<sup>1102</sup> By late May 2021, the military had suspended around 19,500 university professors and staff and over 125,000 school teachers, according to the Myanmar Teachers Federation (MTF).<sup>1103</sup> The MTF also reported that as many as 90 percent of parents and students had boycotted education ahead of re-openings in June 2021.<sup>1104</sup> The boycott provoked violence and threats against both boycotting teachers and teachers who returned to work.<sup>1105</sup>

### Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 200 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Myanmar. This represented a sharp increase as compared to the previous reporting period. In 2019, the UN verified twelve attacks on schools and five attacks on schools in 2018.<sup>1106</sup> While attacks continued to occur conflict-affected areas of the country and were often attributed to state security forces, the reporting period saw a spread of violence to previously unaffected areas including Mandalay and Yangon regions.

In 2020, the UN verified 10 attacks on schools in Myanmar which were attributed to the Tatmadaw and unidentified perpetrators;<sup>1107</sup> the UN also reported that artillery shelling had damaged some schools.<sup>1108</sup> In addition, GCPEA collected at least six reported incidents of attacks on schools in Rakhine, Kayin, and Chin states from the UN, local and interna-

tional media, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>1109</sup> Attacks consisted of threats, arson, airstrikes, and shelling. Examples included:

- The UN and media sources reported that on February 13, 2020, an artillery shell struck the Basic Education Post-Primary School in Kha Mhwe Chaung village, Buthidaung township, Rakhine state. The blast injured around 20 school children, some of whom were reportedly playing in the school yard at the time of the attack.<sup>1110</sup>
- An eyewitness reported to Amnesty International that on March 29, 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers burned a school building and ten houses in a village in Minbya township, Rakhine state.<sup>1111</sup>
- On May 16, 2020, an unidentified armed party burnt down a middle school and around 200 houses, in Let Kar village in Mrauk-U township, Rakhine state, according to Human Rights Watch and *Radio Free Asia*. The military accused the Arakan Army (AA) of perpetrating the attack, whereas villagers reported that the Tatmadaw had attacked the village.<sup>1112</sup>

In 2021, GCPEA collated at least 190 reported incidents of attacks on schools from local and international media and NGOs,<sup>1113</sup> an increase of 1,800 percent as compared to the previous year. At least 160 of these incidents involved the reported use of explosives.<sup>1114</sup> Similarly, between February 1 and September 22, 2021, the UN reported at least 192 attacks on both schools and school personnel; however, GCPEA could not determine how many were attacks on schools and whether any of the UN's count overlapped with GCPEA's.<sup>1115</sup> Around half of the attacks in 2021 occurred in May, the majority of which involved explosive weapons used by unknown armed groups and which caused numerous injuries as well as damage to education facilities, according to GCPEA and Save the Children.<sup>1116</sup> The State Administration Council in Myanmar reported that 444 schools were allegedly damaged or destroyed between February 1 and November 15, 2021, although this was unverified.<sup>1117</sup> While parties to the conflict rarely claimed responsibility for attacks, armed groups often pointed to the Tatmadaw or pro-junta militias, while the Tatmadaw frequently accused non-state armed groups of perpetrating attacks on schools.<sup>1118</sup> While attacks largely consisted of improvised explosive devices, GCPEA also identified reports of arson, shelling, and airstrikes. Following the February 2021 coup, GCPEA identified reports of attacks on schools in states and regions previously less affected by conflict, such as Mandalay, Magway, Mon, Sagaing, and Yangon.

Examples included:

- International media and local media and civil society reported that on March 9, 2021, armed forces raided a vocational school in Shwepyithar township, Yangon, and looted equipment and motorcycles from the building. The director and three trainees were reportedly arrested. According to his family, the director died the same day and had signs of torture on his body.<sup>1119</sup>
- Save the Children reported that airstrikes hit a school in the south-eastern state of Kayin on or around March 27, 2021, destroying the building which was empty at the time of the attack.<sup>1120</sup>
- On June 2, 2021, airstrikes allegedly conducted by the Tatmadaw struck a school in Da Lu village, Tanai township, Kachin state, according to media sources.<sup>1121</sup>
- Local media sources reported that on June 2, 2021, a bomb exploded at a high school in Ta Loke Htaw village, Twantay district, Yangon.<sup>1122</sup>
- On June 22, 2021, a bomb exploded under a table in a high school in Moemauk, Bhamo district, Kachin state, according to local media sources. The explosion injured a teacher, a school guard, and the guard's son.<sup>1123</sup>
- Local media reported that on December 13, 2021, the Myanmar army fired shells at Ke Bar village, Sagaing region, and then set fire to more than 100 houses as well as destroying a school.<sup>1124</sup>

### ***Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel***

In the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 12 reported attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in Myanmar. In the period covered by *Education under Attack 2020*, GCPEA identified occasional reports of such attacks, with only one incident in each 2018 and 2019, along with anecdotal evidence of shelling affecting students on the way to and from school.<sup>1125</sup>

In 2020, GCPEA collected two reports of attacks on school students and teachers, both of which involved explosive weapons:

- Local media sources reported that on January 7, 2020, an explosion killed or injured around 10 school children and one teacher near Htate Htoo Pauk village Buthidaung township, Rakhine state. The children, aged eight to ten, were gathering firewood.<sup>1126</sup>
- On September 8, 2020, artillery shelling hit two seven-year-old children and a teacher in Nyaung Kan village, Myebon Township, Rakhine state, according to a local media report. The two children were on their way to school at the time of the attack, whereas the teacher's location was not reported.<sup>1127</sup>

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least ten reported incidents of attack on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.<sup>1128</sup> While many school students and teachers were affected by the military's crackdown on participants of the CDM, students and teachers appeared to be targeted for their political activity and were not targeted at or on the way to or from school. Some examples included:

- On June 7, 2021, Border Guard Forces allegedly threatened to prosecute students and their families if they did not to attend school in Wepyan village, Hpa-an district, Kayin state.<sup>1129</sup> According to the media report, some families in the village had not yet sent children back to school.
- On June 16, 2021, a deputy education officer was allegedly shot and killed in front of a high school in Thanlyin-Kyauktan township, Yangon region, by unknown perpetrators.<sup>1130</sup>
- On November 5, 2021, a female high school teacher was reportedly shot and killed in a taxi while on her way to work in North Okkalapa township, Yangon region; an armed group claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>1131</sup>

### ***Military use of schools and universities***

GCPEA identified over 220 cases of military use during the 2020-2021 reporting period. The military use of schools and universities increased sharply in 2021 as compared to earlier years. By comparison, the UN verified in 51 cases of military use of schools in 2019 and reported 30 cases in 2018.<sup>1132</sup>

In 2020, the UN verified 30 cases of military use in Myanmar.<sup>1133</sup> In the same year, GCPEA collected six reports of military use of schools as bases or detention centers in Rakhine state from media and human rights organizations, some of which may have been included in UN tallies.<sup>1134</sup> example:

- A local human rights monitor reported that on January 4, 2020, Tatmadaw forces used a school in a village in Ann township, Rakhine state, to detain a woman and her son. The troops, who reportedly accused her husband of storing weapons for AA, allegedly tortured the detained woman.<sup>1135</sup>
- *Radio Free Asia* received eyewitness reports that on March 13, 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers instructed residents of Tin Ma Thit village, Kyauktaw township, Rakhine state, to gather at the village's school where they proceeded to arrest eight residents and transported them to an unknown location.<sup>1136</sup>
- *Radio Free Asia* reported that around May 5, 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers placed heavy weapons in front of the primary school in Min village, Minbya township, Rakhine state, and allegedly launched an operation. The report also claimed that the soldiers used the school and houses around it as temporary lodging.<sup>1137</sup>

In 2021, the military use of both schools and universities sharply increased and spread to new areas of the country, as a part of the military's response to the CDM. Between February and September 2021, the UN reported that 176 education facilities had been used for military purposes.<sup>1138</sup> The UN had also received information that security forces had injured teachers in at least one school while taking over the building.<sup>1139</sup> In addition, GCPEA identified over 80 reported incidents of the military use of schools and universities in 2021 from NGO and media sources.<sup>1140</sup> These reports described the military occupation of schools in eleven states and regions, including Yangon and Mandalay, beginning in March 2021. It was unclear if these incidents overlapped with the number of incidents reported by the UN. According to media sources, the Tatmadaw occupied several schools, universities, and other public buildings on March 7, 2021, as part a coordinated military act.<sup>1141</sup> Reports often described community and student resistance to the use of education buildings. Examples included:

- On March 7, 2021, soldiers forcibly entered Mandalay Technical University in Mandalay city and shot teargas and rubber bullets to vacate students and staff from the campus, according to Scholars at Risk and local media. The report also mentioned that soldiers intended to halt anti-coup protest activities.<sup>1142</sup> Media sources reported on March 8, 2021, that security forces had occupied all universities in Mandalay city;<sup>1143</sup> at least seven universities operated in Mandalay in 2021.<sup>1144</sup>
- Local media reported that on March 9, 2021, in Dawei township, Dawei district, Tanintharyi region, state security forces occupied Dawei Computer University, Dawei Technological University, and Dawei University as base camps, along with a hospital and other civilian buildings. The military allegedly fired gunshots at local residents who opposed the occupations.<sup>1145</sup>
- Media sources reported that on March 17, 2021, Tatmadaw soldiers stayed in an unspecified number of schools and monasteries in villages in Pekon township, Taunggyi district, Shan state, at the border of Shan and Kayah states. Media reported that that military arrested 20 villagers who protested the use of the civilian buildings, later releasing 18.<sup>1146</sup>
- On April 9, 2021, Tatmadaw conducted a violent crackdown on anti-coup protesters in Bago city, killing more than 80 people, according to media sources,<sup>1147</sup> after which they reportedly stacked dead bodies in a school compound.<sup>1148</sup>
- The *BBC* and local media reported that on December 23, 2021, in Natchaung village, Sagaing region, soldiers stationed in the village school carried out a military operation. Local media reported that an armed resistance group attacked the school and that around 100 soldiers were stationed inside.<sup>1149</sup>

### **Attacks on higher education**

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected over 20 reports of attacks on higher education students, staff, and facilities, most which occurred in 2021. Some of these attacks occurred as Tatmadaw took over university campuses. Attacks on higher education appeared to increase as compared to earlier years. GCPEA collected around four incidents of attacks on higher education students in 2018 and 2019 combined.<sup>1150</sup>

In 2020, GCPEA collected one reported attack on higher education. On September 27, 2020, police reportedly arrested several students inside a student union office on campus at Pakokku University, Magway Region. The students had reportedly participated in peaceful protests.<sup>1151</sup>

In 2021, GCPEA identified eight reported attacks on higher education students and staff,<sup>1152</sup> along with 12 reported attacks on university facilities.<sup>1153</sup> After the military coup in 2021, armed forces began a violent crackdown against dissidents that included the targeting of student leaders and the storming and occupation of universities, amongst other public buildings (See above).<sup>1154</sup> These attacks appeared to escalate in March 2021. Examples included:

- Scholars at Risk and local media reported that on February 14, 2021, 20 soldiers raided Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University in Meiktila city, Mandalay region. Over the course of 30 minutes, the soldiers allegedly threatened students and staff to comply with military orders.<sup>1155</sup>
- Scholars at Risk and media sources reported that security forces wearing civilian attire arrested a faculty member of University of Yangon, in Yangon city, on March 2, 2021. The arrest allegedly occurred at the campus gates where students and staff had met to protest; police also used force to disperse the remaining protesters.<sup>1156</sup>
- On March 7, 2021, students gathered to protest the occupation of Yenangyaung University by military forces, in Yenangyaung, Magway region, according to *Radio Free Asia*. Police allegedly used force, fired teargas, and shot rubber bullets, injuring at least two students; four students were also reportedly arrested.<sup>1157</sup>
- On May 14, 2021, a bomb exploded at Taunggyi Technological University in Taunggyi town, Shan state, according to local media reports. Students were allegedly in class at the time of the explosion; reports identified that one civilian was injured and another was killed but did not specify their status as students or personnel.<sup>1158</sup> A local people's defense group had allegedly taken responsibility for the attack, according to media sources.<sup>1159</sup>

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- <sup>1099</sup> “Myanmar: Junta Blocks Lifesaving Aid,” Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2021.
- <sup>1100</sup> “UNICEF Education COVID-19 Response Update – October,” UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, October 28, 2020.
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- <sup>1102</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>1103</sup> “More than 125,000 Myanmar teachers suspended for opposing coup,” *Reuters*, May 22, 2021.
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- <sup>1106</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, Myanmar chapter, pp. 170-171.
- <sup>1107</sup> UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, para. 124.
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<sup>1122</sup> “Myanmar Daily Post-Coup Update: June 2,” *The Irrawaddy*, June 3, 2021. *Democratic Voice of Burma*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR18256.

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<sup>1124</sup> Maung Shwe Wah, “Myanmar military torches 100 homes in Sagaing Region village,” *Myanmar Now*, December 14, 2021.

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<sup>1130</sup> “Spring Revolution Daily News for 16 June 2021,” *Mizzima*, June 17, 2021.

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<sup>1137</sup> Radio Free Asia; Development Media Group, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR10175. “Myanmar Military Column, Artillery Firings Displace Rakhine Villagers,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 7, 2020.

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<sup>1155</sup> Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Monitor, Myanmar Aerospace Engineering University, February 14, 2021. Naw Say Phaw Waa, "Military installs new education minister as uprising grows," *University World News*, February 19, 2021. Myanmar Now, "Soldiers raid aerospace university in Meiktila," Myanmar Now, February 15, 2021.

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<sup>1157</sup> *Radio Free Asia*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR13281. RFA, "Myanmar Junta Occupies Schools, Hospitals and Shuttters 5 Media Outlets in Fresh Clampdown," *Radio Free Asia*, March 8, 2021.

<sup>1158</sup> Shan Herald Agency for News, "Explosions Causes Fear and Fatality in Burma," *BNI Online*, May 19, 2021. *Myanmar Labour News*; *Shan Herald Agency for News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR16881.

<sup>1159</sup> *Myanmar Labour News*; *Shan Herald Agency for News*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MMR16881.