

## THE PHILIPPINES

***Attacks on education occurred in the context of continued armed conflict in several regions of the Philippines in 2020 and 2021. As in previous years, attacks on schools, students, and educators occurred sporadically, with Lumad schools and teachers in Mindanao particularly targeted.***

### **Context**

Armed hostilities continued in the Philippines in 2020 and 2021 in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), in the south, and in Negros and the Central Visayas region, in the center of the country, according to the UN and International Crisis Group.<sup>1423</sup> Meanwhile, violence related to the government's anti-illegal drug campaign increased nationwide.<sup>1424</sup>

Conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines and non-state armed groups, notably the New People's Army (NPA), continued to forcibly displace people in Mindanao in 2020 and 2021.<sup>1425</sup> The effects of the fighting, which continued during the Covid-19 pandemic, differentially impacted women and girls due to traditional gender roles and families prioritizing other members, according to *The New Humanitarian*.<sup>1426</sup> Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the UN reported that violence against human rights leaders and Lumad and other Indigenous communities rose in the context of the anti-communist insurgency campaign in Mindanao.<sup>1427</sup>

Throughout the reporting period, the Philippine government and armed forces labeled some individuals and organizations as "communist," which limited freedom of expression and led to harassment and attacks, according to rights organizations and the UN.<sup>1428</sup> In January 2021, the government named 18 universities and colleges as recruitment sites for the NPA.<sup>1429</sup> In the same month, the Department of National Defense ended a 32-year accord with the University of the Philippines which had prohibited military and police presence on campuses without prior notification, a policy ostensibly aimed to safeguard academic activities.<sup>1430</sup> Additionally, the July 2020 Anti-Terrorism Law allowed police or military detention without a warrant for 14 days; Amnesty International described the law as overly broad and a risk to human rights activists.<sup>1431</sup>

Violence and conflict affected children and hindered access to education.<sup>1432</sup> Between June 2016 and April 2020, 73 children were killed in the anti-illegal drug campaign, according to the Commission on Human Rights,<sup>1433</sup> although local human rights organizations reported over 100 children killed.<sup>1434</sup> Human Rights Watch found that the health and well-being of thousands of children deteriorated due to the anti-illegal drug campaign, which included the killing of parents. The trauma and loss of family caused many children to leave school.<sup>1435</sup> Children from the indigenous Lumad group were particularly affected in 2020; 23 Lumad schools were forcibly closed, by closure orders, permit non-renewal, or destruction by presumed paramilitaries, according to the Save our Schools (SOS) Network.<sup>1436</sup>

The government closed primary and secondary schools in March 2020 in response to Covid-19.<sup>1437</sup> In October 2020, schools initiated distance learning for more than 24.7 million students, but in-person learning did not resume.<sup>1438</sup> In November 2021, the Department of Education announced that 100 public schools located in low-risk areas started conducting classes in person.<sup>1439</sup>

### **Attacks on schools**

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least eight attacks on schools. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2020* included two reported incidents of attacks on schools in 2019 and five such incidents in 2018.<sup>1440</sup> In addition, the UN verified 62 attacks on schools and education personnel between 2017 and 2019, most of which occurred in 2017.<sup>1441</sup>

Between July 2016 and September 2020, SOS Network documented 1,030 attacks on schools, students, and education personnel in Mindanao, including the forced closure of schools, aerial bombardment, threats, and indiscriminate firing.<sup>1442</sup> Since some of the attacks do not meet GCPEA's definitions, and the timeline spans several years, the number is not included in the total attacks on schools in this report.

In 2020, the UN verified two attacks on schools in Bukidnon and Agusan del Sur provinces, committed by the NPA and

an unidentified perpetrator.<sup>1443</sup> Separately, GCPEA identified three incidents of attacks on schools in 2020:

- Ten members of the Philippine Army and National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, dressed in civilian clothes, reportedly threatened village officials to close a school in Kisante barangay, Cotabato province, on May 26, 2020.<sup>1444</sup>
- On March 31, 2020, Philippine Army soldiers reportedly entered the grounds of the Community Technical College of Southern Mindanao's school farm, in Maco, Davao de Oro province. The institution's administration alleged the soldiers were trespassing.<sup>1445</sup>
- On August 26, 2020, around 50 members of a paramilitary group reportedly attacked a Lumad school in Sitio Laburon, Bukidnon province; they knocked down school walls and tore up textbooks.<sup>1446</sup> According to SOS Network, two school buildings and a teachers' cottage were destroyed.<sup>1447</sup>

In 2021, the UN verified five attacks on schools.<sup>1448</sup>

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

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected approximately five reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. In comparison, GCPEA collected approximately ten and nine reported attacks in 2019 and 2018, respectively.<sup>1449</sup>

GCPEA identified four reported attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2020.<sup>1450</sup> For example:

- On April 5, 2020, Philippine military personnel and police officers reportedly stopped a student and his parent at a Covid-19 checkpoint, in Maco municipality, Davao de Oro province, then detained them at a police station for six hours, where they were threatened not to enroll in any Lumad schools next school year.<sup>1451</sup>
- Around May 2020, student-teacher volunteers associated with a Lumad education organization at the University of the Philippines Diliman reportedly received death threats via text and on social media claiming the volunteers were supporters of the communist NPA.<sup>1452</sup>
- On October 16, 2020, suspected non-state armed group members fired on teachers in Awasian barangay, Surigao del Sur province. According to local media, the primary school teachers were travelling to deliver distance learning modules to their students at the time of the attack; no teachers were reported harmed in the attack.<sup>1453</sup>

In 2021, GCPEA collected one report of an attack on students and teachers. On February 15, 2021, police detained 19 Lumad students and seven others including two teachers, after raiding a Lumad school, in Cebu City, Cebu province, according to Human Rights Watch and SOS Network.<sup>1454</sup> The school, located inside a Catholic university, had hosted displaced Lumad students through its "Bakwit" program for nearly a year after they fled conflict on Mindanao and were reportedly unable to return home during Covid-19 travel restrictions. Meanwhile, the government reported that the police and the Department of Social Welfare and Development rescued the children from NPA recruiters.<sup>1455</sup>

### ***Attacks on higher education***

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected sporadic reports of attacks on higher education. GCPEA collected no reported attacks on higher education in 2018 and 2019.<sup>1456</sup>

In 2020, GCPEA identified one reported attack on higher education. On June 5, 2020, police reportedly arrested at least three students holding a protest over the Anti-Terrorism Act on the campus of the University of the Philippines, in Cebu City, Cebu province, as reported by Scholars at Risk and local media. Police said the protesters violated Covid-19 restrictions on mass gathering, according to the news reports.<sup>1457</sup>

GCPEA collected one report of an attack on higher education in 2021. On October 3, 2021, two grenades were reportedly detonated at Bicol University in Legazpi City, Albay province. No injuries were reported; however, the campus was slightly damaged, including an administration building.<sup>1458</sup>

- <sup>1423</sup> UN Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in the Philippines,” A/HRC/44/22, June 29, 2020, paras. 63-64. Amnesty International, *“My Job Is to Kill”: Ongoing Human Rights Violations and Impunity in the Philippines* (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2020), pp. 15-19. International Crisis Group, “CrisisWatch,” Philippines section, December 2020.
- <sup>1424</sup> Amnesty International, *“My Job Is to Kill”* (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2020), p. 6-7. Phil Robertson, “Another Spike in Philippines’ ‘Drug War’ Deaths,” Human Rights Watch dispatches, September 28, 2020.
- <sup>1425</sup> UNHCR, “Mindanao Displacement Dashboard,” April 2020. UNHCR, “Philippines: Mindanao Displacement Dashboard, October 2021 - Issue No. 86,” November 30, 2021.
- <sup>1426</sup> Noraida Abo and Abie Ayao, “Violence or the virus? Mindanao’s displaced forced to choose,” *The New Humanitarian*, June 1, 2020.
- <sup>1427</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2020 (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2021), Philippines chapter. Amnesty International, *“My Job Is to Kill”* (London, UK: Amnesty International, 2020), pp. 15-19. UN Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in the Philippines,” A/HRC/44/22, June 29, 2020, paras. 51-56, 69. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2021 (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2022), Philippines chapter.
- <sup>1428</sup> UN Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in the Philippines,” A/HRC/44/22, June 29, 2020, para. 49. Phil Robertson, “Philippine General Should Answer for ‘Red-Tagging,’” Human Rights Watch dispatches, February 10, 2021.
- <sup>1429</sup> “Top universities denounce red-tagging of schools,” *Rappler*, January 24, 2021. Elvira Ramirez-Cohn, “Lawmakers say universities should be military-free zones,” *University World News*, February 10, 2021.
- <sup>1430</sup> Elvira Ramirez-Cohn, “Lawmakers say universities should be military-free zones,” *University World News*, February 10, 2021. Jason Gutierrez, “Duterte’s Forces Have a New Target: University Students,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 2021.
- <sup>1431</sup> “Philippines: Dangerous anti-terror law yet another setback for human rights,” Amnesty International news release, July 3, 2020.
- <sup>1432</sup> “UN urges Bangsamoro Government to investigate Maguindanao conflict killing two children,” UNICEF press release, May 28, 2020. UN Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in the Philippines,” A/HRC/44/22, June 29, 2020, para. 21. Information received from SOS Network March 1, 2021.
- <sup>1433</sup> UN Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in the Philippines,” A/HRC/44/22, June 29, 2020, para. 21.
- <sup>1434</sup> OMCT and Children’s Legal Rights and Development Center, *“How Could They Do This to My Child?” Extrajudicial killings of children during the “war on drugs” in the Philippines* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Organization against Torture and Children’s Legal Rights and Development Center, 2020), p. 3.
- <sup>1435</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“Our Happy Family Is Gone”: Impact of the “War on Drugs” on Children in the Philippines* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2020), pp. 2, 11.
- <sup>1436</sup> Information received from SOS Network March 1, 2021.
- <sup>1437</sup> UNICEF, “Filipino children continue missing education opportunities in another year of school closure.” August 25, 2021. “Fighting Against a World Without Education” FundLife International news release, March 17, 2021.
- <sup>1438</sup> World Health Organization, “Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report #50,” WHO situation report, August 25, 2020, pp. 4-6. Bonz Magsambol, “Over 24 million Filipino students back to school during pandemic,” *Rappler*, October 5, 2020.
- <sup>1439</sup> Enrico Dela Cruz and Karen Lema “Philippines starts to reopen schools after 20-month coronavirus closure,” *Reuters*, November 15, 2021.
- <sup>1440</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York: GCPEA), pp. 202-203.
- <sup>1441</sup> UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict in the Philippines,” S/2020/777, August 4, 2020, para. 42.
- <sup>1442</sup> Information received from SOS Network March 1, 2021.
- <sup>1443</sup> UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873–S/2021/437, May 6, 2020, para. 269.
- <sup>1444</sup> Information received in March 2021; Ken E. Cagula, “Lumad schools still facing harassment during lockdown,” *Davao Today*, May 18, 2020.
- <sup>1445</sup> Information received from NGO respondent in March 2021.
- <sup>1446</sup> Raymund B. Villanueva, “Paramilitary destroys Lumad school; leader blames Duterte for the attack,” *Bulatlat*, August 30, 2020. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*; *Rappler*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL11057.
- <sup>1447</sup> “Alert,” Save Our Schools Network, August 29, 2020.
- <sup>1448</sup> Information shared by a UN respondent via email on April 20, 2022.
- <sup>1449</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York: GCPEA), pp. 203-205.
- <sup>1450</sup> Information received from NGO respondent in March 2021. Niña Diño, “Dwindling numbers: Lumad schools continue to suffer closures, attacks during pandemic,” *Rappler*, September 18, 2020. Mike Crismundo, “Teachers with learning modules fired upon by NPAs in Surigao del Sur,” *Manila Bulletin*, October 19, 2020. *Manila Bulletin*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL11254.
- <sup>1451</sup> Information received from NGO respondent in March 2021.
- <sup>1452</sup> Information received from NGO respondent in March 2021. Niña Diño, “Dwindling numbers: Lumad schools continue to suffer closures, attacks during pandemic,” *Rappler*, September 18, 2020.
- <sup>1453</sup> Mike Crismundo, “Teachers with learning modules fired upon by NPAs in Surigao del Sur,” *Manila Bulletin*, October 19, 2020. *Manila Bulletin*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL11254.

<sup>1454</sup> Carlos H. Conde, “Troubling Raid on Philippine Indigenous School,” Human Rights Watch dispatches, February 17, 2021. “Alert,” Save Our Schools Network, February 14, 2021.

<sup>1455</sup> *Manila Bulletin*; *Bulatlat*; *Rappler*; *Sunstar* (Philippines), as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL11793. Carlos H. Conde, “Troubling Raid on Philippine Indigenous School,” Human Rights Watch dispatches, February 17, 2021. “Philippines police raid targets displaced Indigenous students,” *Al Jazeera*, February 16, 2021. “Alert,” Save Our Schools Network, February 14, 2021.

<sup>1456</sup> GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York: GCPEA), p. 206.

<sup>1457</sup> Ratzel San Juan, “Cebu police arrest 7 anti-terror bill protesters, trap scores in UP Cebu,” *PhilStar*. Ador Vincent Mayol and Nestle Semilla, “Terror bill protests: Cebu cops arrest 8 inside UP campus,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 6, 2020. University of the Philippines, Scholars at Risk, Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.

<sup>1458</sup> *Abante*; *Philippine Daily Inquirer* as cited in ACLED, Event ID PHL12639. “Police on alert after blasts at Bicol University,” *Daily Tribune*, October 4, 2021. “Twin blasts hit Bicol University,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 4, 2021.