

SOUTH SUDAN

Fighting continued in South Sudan in 2020 and 2021, despite the signing of peace accords and formation of a transitional government. Attacks on, and military use of, schools declined slightly compared to previous years. GCPEA also identified two reports of attacks on higher education.

Context

In February 2020, the South Sudanese government and main armed opposition group, Sudan People's Liberation Movement-Army In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO), established a transitional government under the 2018 peace accords.¹⁴⁹² That same month, President Salva Kiir announced the return to the ten-state system, including three Administrative Areas, which eased a stalled peace process but led to the removal of local government officials from their posts and created disruptions in political, social, and economic relations across South Sudan.¹⁴⁹³ Despite the peace accords and formation of the transitional government, fighting periodically surged in 2020 and 2021.¹⁴⁹⁴

In 2020, the UN documented over 1,100 violent events, an increase compared to the previous year, and which affected over 5,800 civilians, and included sexual violence and the killing of children.¹⁴⁹⁵ In 2021, the UN reported a decrease in the number of violent events and harm against civilians generally, but identified an increase in violence perpetrated by militias against civilians in the Tambura area of Western Equatoria.¹⁴⁹⁶ In the Equatoria region, in the south, the National Salvation Front (NAS), a non-signatory to the peace process, fought against the government's South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF), demanding increased political autonomy for Equatoria, according to the International Crisis Group.¹⁴⁹⁷ In that context, the UN found that NAS abducted men, women, and children to serve in their ranks in Central Equatoria state, and SSPDF soldiers committed sexual violence against women and girls.¹⁴⁹⁸ In the northeast, *The New Humanitarian* reported increased inter-communal violence in Pibor and Jonglei states in 2021, tied to national politics and disputes over resources including grazing land.¹⁴⁹⁹

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reported that the National Security Service arbitrarily detained, tortured, and forcibly disappeared journalists, activists, and government critics during the reporting period.¹⁵⁰⁰ Amnesty International also reported that security service agents maintained networks at Juba University.¹⁵⁰¹

South Sudan experienced several humanitarian crises during the reporting period, including flooding, food insecurity, and the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁵⁰² Flooding damaged, prevented access to, or caused the closure of around 400 schools in 2020 and over 500 schools in 2021.¹⁵⁰³ The UN reported that over 8.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, including more than 4.5 million children.¹⁵⁰⁴

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, approximately 2.2 million children were out of school in South Sudan.¹⁵⁰⁵ The education of two million additional students was disrupted during school closures which began in March 2020 to prevent the spread of the virus.¹⁵⁰⁶ The government resumed candidate classes in October 2020,¹⁵⁰⁷ then reopened all schools in May 2021.¹⁵⁰⁸ Oxfam found that girl students, many of whom were subjected to forced marriage, gender-based violence, or domestic work during school closures, experienced difficulties returning to school after they reopened.¹⁵⁰⁹

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected 11 reported incidents of attacks on schools. The number of reported attacks declined slightly compared to previous years, when GCPEA identified approximately ten and 18 reported attacks on schools in 2019 and 2018, respectively.¹⁵¹⁰

In 2020, GCPEA identified three reported incidents of attacks on schools, consisting of arson and looting. In addition, the UN Mine Action Service assessed primary schools in Wau, Western Bahr el-Ghazal state, in 2020, to remove and destroy explosive ordnance and ammunition, as well as turn over the land around the schools for safe use.¹⁵¹¹ Examples of attacks included:

- On August 16, 2020, a school vehicle was burned in Lobonok area, Central Equatoria.¹⁵¹²
- In August 2020, assailants reportedly looted Salaam Primary School in Yei tow, Central Equatoria state, and burned down the school's office. According to media reports, textbooks and other learning materials were taken

from the school, which was closed at the time due to Covid-19 prevention measures.¹⁵¹³

- On December 31, 2020, unidentified assailants reportedly raided a primary school in Rombur village, Central Equatoria state. According to local media outlet *Juba Monitor*, school materials were looted in the attack.¹⁵¹⁴

In 2021, GCPEA gathered eight incident reports of attacks on schools, from media, UN, and NGO reporting.¹⁵¹⁵ Attacks involved, arson, looting, crossfire, and explosive weapons. For instance:

- According to Save the Children and news reports, unidentified assailants looted a school in Eastern Equatoria State on June 20, 2021, killing a security guard and stealing learning kits. No children were present at the time of the attack.¹⁵¹⁶
- On July 4, 2021, an armed group looted Liech Primary School in Rubkona internally displaced people camp in Unity state, stealing learning materials and damaging six classrooms.¹⁵¹⁷
- On July 8 and 9, 2021, at least two schools were damaged and looted in Marial Lou town, Tonj North county, Warrap state, during fighting between groups of armed youth, according to the UN and news reports.¹⁵¹⁸
- On November 3, 2021, a grenade explosion at an out-of-use school in Ayod county, Jonglei state, killed three children and wounded seven others, according to local media outlet *Radio Tamazuj*.¹⁵¹⁹

Military use of schools and universities

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified at least ten reported instances of the military use of schools. In comparison, *Education under Attack 2020* included 20 and 35 reports of military use in 2019 and 2018, respectively.¹⁵²⁰

The UN verified the use of ten schools by SSPDF and SPLM/A-IO in 2020.¹⁵²¹ Also in 2020, the UN Mine Action Service surveyed a primary school in Bentiu, Unity state, which had been used as a military garrison, in order to remove explosive ordnance.¹⁵²² Separately, GCPEA gathered four reports of the military use of schools in 2020, some of which may overlap with the UN-verified incidents:

- Around January 1, 2020, government forces which had been occupying Jambo primary school in Mugwo County, Yei River state, reportedly vacated the institution, according to the county commissioner in an interview with local media outlet *Radio Tamazuj*.¹⁵²³
- The UN reported that, on January 7, 2020, SSPDF and Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition soldiers used a school in Kalyak, Unity, to host police forces.¹⁵²⁴
- Sometime between June 1 and early August 2020, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Malik Agar faction occupied a school in Maban county, Upper Nile state, according to the UN.¹⁵²⁵
- In an offensive on Lasu town, in Yei River state, in December 2019, SSPDF soldiers occupied Lasu primary school, as well as injuring civilians and burning churches, according to the UN.¹⁵²⁶ The soldiers reportedly continued to partially occupy the primary school through 2020 and into late 2021, creating fear in students who attended classes there.¹⁵²⁷

In 2021, the UN verified the use of nine schools.¹⁵²⁸ Between June and August of that year, the UN verified the occupation of two schools, one in Western Bahr el-Ghazal state by SPLM/A-IO, and another in Central Equatoria state by SSPDF.¹⁵²⁹ In September and October 2021, GCPEA identified two cases of military use, which may overlap with the UN-verified incidents:

- For several weeks around September and October 2021, SSPDF soldiers occupied a primary school in Tambura town, Western Equatoria state. Amnesty International documented that the soldiers used the school as a barracks during fighting, until government representatives negotiated with them to vacate the premises.¹⁵³⁰
- SSPDF forces used a primary school in Yei town, Central Equatoria state, as a barracks in October 2021. Parents and the community transferred their children from the school for fear of the soldiers harassing students.¹⁵³¹

Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified two reports of attacks on higher education. Higher education

attacks appeared to remain constant with 2018 and 2019, when GCPEA identified one attack each year.¹⁵³²

In 2020, GCPEA identified two reported attacks on higher education. Of these, one event directly targeted a higher education facility and the other affected university students:

- On June 20, 2020, alleged SSPDF soldiers looted non-governmental organizations housed inside a Christian college in Romogi, Central Equatoria state, as reported by local media outlet *Radio Tamazuj*.¹⁵³³
- On November 23, 2020, security forces reportedly injured ten students and arrested four students protesting at the University of Juba, in Juba, Central Equatoria state. International media outlet *Voice of America* reported the students protested over the expulsion of some of their peers from the university.¹⁵³⁴

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¹⁴⁹⁴ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/46/53, February 4, 2021, paras. 16, 20-21. “South Sudan: United Nations arms embargo must remain in place after surge in violence against civilians in 2020,” Amnesty International advocacy brief, November 30, 2020. “Hundreds killed in violence in South Sudan between June-Sept 2021, UN says,” *Reuters*, March 1, 2022.

¹⁴⁹⁵ UNMISS HRD, “Annual Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians January-December 2020,” United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Human Rights Division, February 2021.

¹⁴⁹⁶ UNMISS HRD, “Annual Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians January-December 2021,” United Nations Mission in South Sudan, February 2022, pp.1-2. UNMISS HRD, “Brief on Violence Affecting Civilians July-September 2021,” United Nations Mission in South Sudan, Human Rights Division, December 2021, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴⁹⁷ “South Sudan’s Other War: Resolving the Insurgency in Equatoria,” International Crisis Group, briefing no. 169, February 25, 2021.

¹⁴⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/46/53, February 4, 2021, paras. 30-31, 70-73.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Sam Mednick, “Floods, fighting, famine: Inside South Sudan’s triple crisis,” *The New Humanitarian*, February 8, 2021.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), South Sudan chapter. Human Rights Watch, “What Crime Was I Paying For? Abuses by South Sudan’s National Security Service (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020). Al, “These Walls Have Ears”: The Chilling Effect of Surveillance in South Sudan (London: Amnesty International, 2022).

¹⁵⁰¹ Al, “These Walls Have Ears”: The Chilling Effect of Surveillance in South Sudan (London: Amnesty International, 2022), pp. 34, 36.

¹⁵⁰² UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/46/53, February 4, 2021, para. 51. Edith M. Lederer, “UN mandates South Sudan force to prevent return to civil war,” *AP*, March 12, 2021. UNICEF, “South Sudan,” UNICEF Humanitarian Situation Report No. 153, January 31, 2021.

¹⁵⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, “Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan,” A/HRC/46/53, February 4, 2021, para. 51. OCHA, *South Sudan Humanitarian Fund 2020 Annual Report* (South Sudan: OCHA, 2021), p. 7. UNICEF, “Flood Response Update: South Sudan,” UNICEF report, May to November 2021.

¹⁵⁰⁴ “Humanitarian Action for Children: South Sudan,” UNICEF appeal, 2022.

¹⁵⁰⁵ “Education in South Sudan: Briefing Note,” UNICEF briefing note, 2021, p. 1. “Humanitarian Action for Children: South Sudan,” UNICEF appeal, 2021, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰⁶ “Humanitarian Action for Children: South Sudan,” UNICEF appeal, 2021. “South Sudan,” UNICEF Humanitarian Situation Report No. 153, January 31, 2021.

¹⁵⁰⁷ “UNICEF and UNESCO welcome the decision to reopen schools in South Sudan,” UNESCO press release, September 22, 2020. “South Sudan schools reopen after 6 months of lockdown,” *Xinhua*, October 6, 2020.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Richard Ruati, “Hope revived as schools reopen,” UNICEF article.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Oxfam International, *COVID-19 and female learners in South Sudan* (UK: Oxfam International, 2021).

¹⁵¹⁰ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2021), p. 214-215.

¹⁵¹¹ UN Security Council, “Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,” February 26, 2020, S/2020/145, para. 73.

¹⁵¹² Information received from an international NGO respondent via email on January 2, 2022.

¹⁵¹³ “Primary School looted in Yei’s Central Equatoria State,” *South Sudan Exposed*, September 4, 2020.

¹⁵¹⁴ *Juba Monitor*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD7237. James Atem Kuir, “Raiders loot 32 goats in Luri Payam,” *Juba Monitor*, January 4, 2021.

¹⁵¹⁵ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

¹⁵¹⁶ *Radio Tamazuj*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD7721. “South Sudan: Brutal Killing of Save the Children Contractor,” Save the Children press re-

lease, June 24, 2021.

¹⁵¹⁷ Information received from an international NGO respondent via email on January 2, 2022.

¹⁵¹⁸ UNOCHA; *Radio Tamazuj*; VOA, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD7769. “Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in South Sudan condemns attack on aid workers and assets in Tonj North, Warrap,” UN OCHA press release, July 14, 2021. “Situation Report #291,” World Food Programme South Sudan, July 16, 2021.

¹⁵¹⁹ *Radio Tamazuj*, as cited in ACLED, Data ID SSD8019. “3 killed, 7 injured in grenade blast in Ayod County,” *Radio Tamazuj*, November 3, 2021.

¹⁵²⁰ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2021), p. 216-217.

¹⁵²¹ 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. 153.

¹⁵²² UN Security Council, “Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,” December 9, 2020, S/2020/1180, para. 71.

¹⁵²³ “Soldiers vacate civilian facilities in Mugwo: official,” *Radio Tamazuj*, January 7, 2020.

¹⁵²⁴ UN Security Council, “Letter dated 28 April 2020 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” S/2020/342, April 28, 2020, para. 59.

¹⁵²⁵ UN Security Council, “Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,” September 8, 2020, S/2020/890, para. 24.

¹⁵²⁶ UN Security Council, “Letter dated 28 April 2020 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” S/2020/342, April 28, 2020, para. 48.

¹⁵²⁷ Information received from an international NGO respondent via email on October 29, 2021.

¹⁵²⁸ Information shared by a UN respondent via email on April 20, 2022.

¹⁵²⁹ UN Security Council, “Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General,” September 9, 2021, S/2021/784, para. 78.

¹⁵³⁰ “South Sudan: Survivors describe killings, mass displacement and terror amid fighting in Western Equatoria,” Amnesty International news release, December 9, 2021.

¹⁵³¹ Information received from an international NGO respondent via email on October 29, 2021.

¹⁵³² GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020* (New York, GCPEA: 2021), p. 217.

¹⁵³³ *Radio Tamazuj*; *Eye Radio* (South Sudan), as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD6861. “Soldiers rob Kajo-Keji Christian College,” *Radio Tamazuj*, June 24, 2020.

¹⁵³⁴ VOA, as cited in ACLED, Event ID SSD7186. “South Sudan in Focus,” VOA, November 23, 2020.