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Education under Attack 2010 - Afghanistan

A CARE report on Afghanistan for the World Bank warns of an "alarming" trend.³²⁰ Between January 2006 and December 2008, 1,153 attacks on education targets were reported, including the damaging or destruction of schools by arson, grenades, mines and rockets; threats to teachers and officials delivered by "night letters" or verbally; the killing of students, teachers and other education staff; and looting. The number of incidents stayed stable at 241 and 242 respectively in 2006 and 2007, but then almost tripled to 670 in 2008.

In 2006 and 2007, 230 people died from attacks on schools, students and education personnel, according to Ministry of Education (MoE) figures. In one incident, dozens of schoolchildren and five teachers were killed when they lined up to meet an MP in Baghlan Province in November 2007.³²¹

From 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2009, 123 schools were targeted by insurgents and 51 received threats, according to the Afghan Rights Monitor, citing figures from UNICEF. At least 60 students and teachers were killed and 204 wounded in security incidents in the same period (and since then, on 9 July 2009, 13 primary pupils were killed when Taliban forces detonated a bomb between two schools in Logar Province).³²² In July 2009, more than 400 schools, mostly in the volatile south, remained closed due to insecurity, the MoE said. UNICEF recorded 98 school incidents in the period from 1 May through 24 June 2009.³²³ At least 26 schools were attacked and partially damaged by the Taliban on election day, 20 August 2009, because they were being used as polling stations, according to the MoE. The schools were hit with rockets, missiles and improvised explosives.³²⁴

In June 2009, six incidents of explosives being found near or in schools and other locations occupied by children were reported. On 21 June 2009, an explosive was placed in a classroom and detonated on the second floor of Do Abe School building, Kahmard District, Bamyan Province. The explosion destroyed part of the second floor and damaged the structure.³²⁵

In April 2009, two schools in Nader Shah Kowt District, Khost Province, were attacked. A portion of one of the school's front walls was damaged.³²⁶

In March 2009, a school in Nader Shah Kowt District, Khost Province was attacked, causing major damage to the building.³²⁷

The MoE reported that terrorist and insurgent attacks killed 149 teachers, other school employees and students during 2008.³²⁸

By September 2008, 600 schools were reported closed, 80 per cent of them in the

southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan.³²⁹

On 14 September 2008, the Taliban reportedly cut off the ears of one teacher in Zabul Province.³³⁰

On 13 August 2008, three humanitarian workers employed by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), who worked specifically on education programming, and one of their drivers were ambushed and killed by the Taliban in the Logar Province of Afghanistan. The second driver was seriously wounded.³³¹

On 9 June 2008, gunmen killed a teacher and his daughter in Nangahar Province.³³²

On 14 May 2008, gunmen killed a teacher in Kunduz Province who had publicly criticized suicide bombing.³³³

On 7 May 2008, The Times reported that 36 attacks on schools and teachers had taken place since the start of the new term on 23 March. School buildings had been set on fire or attacked with grenades; teachers were kidnapped; and, in one case, a caretaker had had his ear and nose cut off as punishment for "co-operating with the Government".³³⁴ In another incident, on 4 April 2008, armed men set fire to the Ortablaq School in northern Kunduz Province and cut off the ears of the night watchman.³³⁵

In some schools, night letters ordering teachers to leave, signed on behalf of the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, were left pinned to the door. In Miyan Abdul Hakim School, Kandahar city, attackers terrorized the caretaker, gathered together desks, floor mats and any textbooks or exercise books they could find, and set fire to them.³³⁶

In Zabul, where the local community had reached an agreement with the Taliban to leave schools alone, Taliban commanders allowed teaching but destroyed religious studies books that promoted reconciliation between Sunni and Shia.³³⁷

By January 2008, attacks on schools and insecurity were preventing 300,000 children from attending school in the south, where 400 schools were closed.³³⁸

In 2007, there were 228 school attacks, resulting in 75 deaths and 111 injuries, according to UNICEF.³³⁹

On 25 October 2007, grenades were thrown into Naswan High School, Shindand District, Herat Province, damaging several classrooms. It was the fourth school to be attacked in the same district in 17 days. Two of them were girls' schools. The area was a hotspot of Taliban insurgency.³⁴⁰

In October 2007, police arrested a student, Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, at Balkh University for downloading and distributing information about the role of women in Islamic societies. He was sentenced to death for "insolence to the Holy Prophet" but his sentence was later commuted to 20 years on appeal.³⁴¹

On 17 June 2007, seven children died when US air planes bombed an Islamic studies school in Zarghun Shah District of Paktika Province in the southeast.³⁴²

Fourteen schools were torched by insurgents in several provinces between April and May 2007, according to the MoE. This was followed by a lull in attacks in June and July, which may have been the result of a "school protection" campaign, encouraging communities to declare publicly their support for education.³⁴³

In February 2007, the headteacher of a girls' high school in Lashkargarh repeatedly received warnings by phone and night letter ordering her to leave her post.³⁴⁴

There was a significant increase in suicide attacks in 2006 and 2007. According to the

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), some of the bombers appeared to be children drawn heavily from madrasas in Pakistan.³⁴⁵

A reported 120 schools were torched and ten teachers killed in 2006, and 273 schools were set on fire in 2005.³⁴⁶

Schoolchildren have increasingly been targeted on their way to or from or at school. In February 2007, a 13-year-old student was reportedly shot dead on his way to Zokur High School in Lashkargarh. Four days later, gunmen fired indiscriminately outside Karte Laghan School, killing a student and a caretaker.³⁴⁷

On 12 June 2007, ten girls were allowed to go home early from the Qalai Sayedan School in Logar Province, Afghanistan. But two men on a motorbike, armed with a machine gun, were waiting for them as they made their way past the school gates and down the dirt road. A burst of automatic fire hit Shukria, 13, in the back and arm. As she fell, her sister Zarmina, 12, ran to her and the gunmen rode close and opened fire again, killing Shukria and one other, and wounding four other girls.³⁴⁸

On 15 June 2007, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of students leaving a school in Tarinkot, Uruzgan Province, killing 11 of them and wounding several others.³⁴⁹

On 12 November 2008, high school girls in Kandahar were attacked with battery acid (see Introduction, p. 1).³⁵⁰

On 28 December 2008, a group of primary school children were walking along a road on their way home from school, close to a checkpoint in Khost Province. They were unaware of a 4X4 vehicle slowly zigzagging its way through the barriers approaching the checkpoint they were passing. As the vehicle drew level with them it exploded. Fourteen pupils were killed. They were all aged 8 to 10.³⁵¹

On 12 May 2009, 98 students and six teachers were admitted to hospital after a mass poisoning at Qazaaq School, north of Kabul.³⁵² Five victims slipped into a coma but were revived. It was the third poison gas attack on schools in the area: scores of pupils were taken ill in separate attacks on schools in Charikar, Kapisa Province, north-east of Kabul. The attack came a day after 61 schoolgirls and one teacher from a school in neighbouring Parwar Province were admitted to hospital with a sudden illness with headaches, vomiting and shivering.³⁵³ The third school was attacked on 26 April 2009, when five teachers and 40 pupils collapsed, overcome by fumes, after a bottle was reportedly thrown into the playground during a ceremony at Sadiqi Padshah School, Charikar.³⁵⁴ After the attacks, many girls expressed fears of going to school in an area where girls' education had been strongly endorsed by local communities and which had never been under firm Taliban control.³⁵⁵

In the cities, where schools are better protected, the targeting of schoolchildren by suicide bombers and abduction for ransom by criminal groups on the journey to or from school were also reported to be significant problems in 2008.³⁵⁶

In May 2009, six girls' schools in Chahar Darreh District, in the northern province of Kunduz, were closed following receipt of letters threatening acid and gas attacks. As a result, teachers and pupils stayed at home and eventually the authorities closed the schools. The district was largely under Taliban control.³⁵⁷

[Refworld note: The source report "Education under Attack 2010" was posted on UNESCO's website (www.unesco.org) in pdf format, with country chapters run together. Original footnote numbers have been retained here.]

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