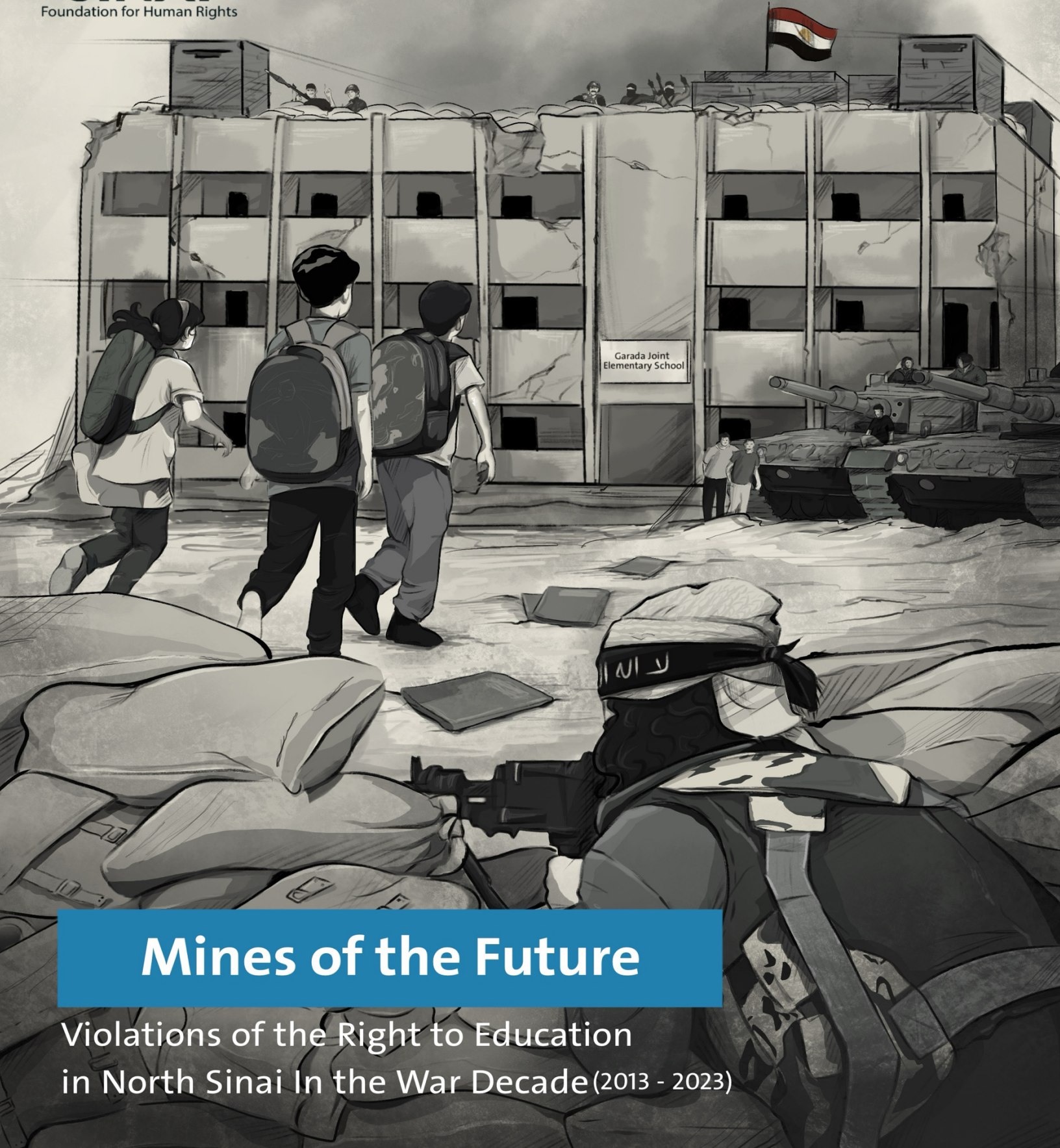




**SINAI**

Foundation for Human Rights



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai In the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



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## Violations of the Right to Education in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



# SINAI

Foundation for Human Rights

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## Contents

<b>I. Executive Summary</b>	1
<b>II. Methodology</b>	9
Evidence Verification	12
First: Visual Content	12
Second: Geospatial Analysis	13
<b>III. Legal Framework</b>	13
Law of Armed Conflict (International Humanitarian Law)	13
International Human Rights Law	18
<b>IV. Egyptian Government Violations of North Sinai Students' Right to Education</b>	22
First: Attacks on Students and Members of the Educational Staff	25
Second: Bombing and Demolishing Schools	33
A) Rafah	35
B) El Sheikh Zuweid	46
C) Al Arish	62
D) Bir Al-Abd	67
E) Al-Hassana	72
Third: Using Schools and Educational Facilities for Military Purposes	79
A) Rafah	80
B) Sheikh Zuweid	92
C) Al Arish	107
D) Bir Al-Abd	112
E) Al-Hassana	124
Fourth: Closing Schools Due to Forced Displacement	130
Fifth: Recruitment of Children	135
<b>V. ISIS Violations of North Sinai Students' Right to Education</b>	139
<b>VI. Recommendations</b>	157
<b>VII. Appendixes</b>	164



## I. Executive Summary

At the end of 2013, military operations escalated between Egyptian government forces, especially the army, and Islamic extremist armed groups. These extremist groups later declared, in 2014, their allegiance to The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and called themselves “Sinai Province”. Since its inception, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights has provided compelling reports on the gross violations of human rights and the rules of war committed by both sides of the conflict. But one key aspect of these violations has not been yet sufficiently addressed, which is violations related to the right to education. This report aims to make up for this lack of information, especially since it is being issued in 2024, after the “Sinai Province” group has been significantly eliminated and after multiple statements by Egyptian officials, including President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, about the return of life to normal in North Sinai.

### **Systematic Violations**

The report documents how armed conflict over the past decade has led to a severe deterioration in access to education for children and students and the protection of the rights of teachers and administrators in North Sinai. All parties to the conflict have systematically attacked schools and educational institutions, violating rights protected by the International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law, and relevant international conventions and agreements on human rights signed and ratified by the state of Egypt, all of which protect educational institutions, educational processes and their participants, even in times of emergency and armed conflicts.

Rigorous evidence gathered by the foundation shows that these violations were systemic and not individual cases. Members of "Sinai Province" and the Egyptian government forces were involved to varying degrees in the systematic violation of the right to education in five cities in Northern Sinai, covering a wide range of areas. These cities include Rafah, El Sheikh Zuweid, Al Arish, Bir Al-Abd, and Al-Hassana, over consecutive periods for several years. The foundation is publishing an interactive map that serves as a





complementary database to this report, displaying a larger volume of evidence of the 135 schools which have been violated. The map includes precise coordinates of schools and exclusive visual materials from dozens of schools in the cities of North Sinai Governorate. It serves as an open-source reference, reflecting the actual reality accessible to government officials, as well as researchers and journalists.<sup>1</sup>

## Grave Violations

Among the systematic and most common violations documented in the report, the Egyptian "law enforcement" forces, combined with the army and the police, particularly the army, have been involved in the destruction of a significant number of schools without providing a real alternative for the students of these schools. Additionally, the army and police forces have also been implicated in targeting some schools during artillery and aerial bombardments. The foundation has documented the destruction of 73 schools in the cities of North Sinai during the period covered by the report.

At times, when the army forcibly displaced the residents of some villages, they left the schools there closed without demolishing them, but also without providing a suitable alternative for the students of those closed schools. The foundation has also documented the closure of 7 schools in the cities of North Sinai for varying periods during the period covered by the report.

In addition, the army and police forces have also been implicated in using schools for military purposes, such as emplacement them as checkpoints and surveillance points, converting them into supply and logistics camps, or as military bases during operations. In some cases, these schools were evacuated of students, and the educational process was stopped. However, in other instances, the violations were even more severe when the army used some schools while students and teachers remained inside, exposing them to serious risks. The foundation documented the use of 49 schools for military purposes in the cities

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<sup>1</sup> Explore the map prepared by SFHR, showing coordinates, violation categories and exclusive footages: <https://sinaifhr.org/educationmap/>



of North Sinai for various long periods of time, during the period covered by the report, some of which are still serving as military barracks at the time of publishing the report.

In the same context, "Sinai Province" group has also been systematically and repeatedly involved in the military use of a number of schools, from surveillance to demolition and destruction. They also carried out various assaults on male and female students and teachers. Additionally, members of the terrorist group have been implicated in stealing school properties, including cash and computers, among other items. "Sinai Foundation" documented the destruction of 4 schools by this group, in addition to the use of 2 schools for military purposes, with members of ISIS occupying them for periods ranging from minutes to hours as a precaution against military airstrikes.

This report elaborates on each type of these violations and describes them within the framework of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law (applicable in times of armed conflict). It provides substantial evidence and case studies collected by the Foundation's research team.

## **Other Indirect but Impactful Violations**

In addition to the direct violations of the right to education, there have been other human rights violations in North Sinai that did not directly target the educational process and its constituents, including students and teachers. However, these violations have had a significant and detrimental impact on the right to education. Among the most notable of these violations are the severe and arbitrary restrictions on the freedom of movement for individuals and vehicles imposed by the Egyptian government forces throughout the years of the conflict, particularly since the end of 2017 with the initiation of what the authorities termed the "Comprehensive Operation".<sup>2</sup> These arbitrary restrictions, coupled with a

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<sup>2</sup> The Egyptian authorities implemented an uninterrupted curfew between 2014 and 2021, and then President Al-Sisi issued a decision granting the Ministry of Defense powers similar to those contained in the emergency law, perpetuating the state of exception and emergency in North Sinai. For more see: "a serious presidential decision" perpetuates the "state of emergency in North Sinai", Sinai foundation for Human Rights, October 5, 2021. <https://sinaifhr.org/show/102>



nightly curfew that lasted for years, have hindered the ability of parents to transport their children to schools and the ability of teachers to move safely.

These restrictions also included cutting off transportation between North Sinai and the rest of the governorates in the mainland of Egypt, resulting in university students enrolled in institutions outside of Sinai falling behind in their studies for months.<sup>3</sup> With the commencement of the military operation "Sinai 2018" the Ministry of Education decided to indefinitely postpone the start of the academic year in all schools in North Sinai, as reported by local news sources.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of this operation, the entire second semester for all educational levels, including preparatory and secondary school certificates, was cancelled in North Sinai schools. The Directorate of Education in the governorate further decided to cancel the exams for those levels, with the grades from the first semester being used as the basis for the second semester, as per an official statement released by the Directorate in April 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Another grave violation that has had a significant impact on the right to education is the allowance for tribal groups supporting the army to recruit children under the age of 18 into armed conflict, whether in combat roles or logistical tasks. This phenomenon has escalated from 2020 to 2023, and it was documented by Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in a detailed report published in August 2023.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For more, see the Human Rights Watch report, "Egypt: Looming Humanitarian Crisis in Sinai," April 23, 2018.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/23/egypt-looming-humanitarian-crisis-sinai>

<sup>4</sup> Ashraf Swelim. "Study in North Sinai Postponed Indefinitely," Masrawy, February 9, 2018.

[https://www.masrawy.com/news/news\\_regions/details/2018/2/9/1259848/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%89](https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_regions/details/2018/2/9/1259848/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%89)

<sup>5</sup> Without Examinations... 'Ministry of Education and Learning' Concludes the Second Semester with "Stage Transfer" and Preparatory Certificates in North Sinai," Mada Masr, April 23, 2018.

[https://www.masrawy.com/news/news\\_regions/details/2018/2/9/1259848/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%89](https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_regions/details/2018/2/9/1259848/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%84-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%89)

<sup>6</sup> For more, see the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights Report: "I was afraid ... I was only seventeen years old," April 2018:

<https://sinaifhr.org//show/204>





On September 15, 2023, the U.S. government, for the first time, included the Egyptian government in the list of governments that employ child soldiers in military operations in its annual Trafficking in Persons Report. This is an important step towards documenting and holding accountable violations that have been taking place in North Sinai for years without deterrence.<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. government, in the report's chapter on Egypt, stated that “during the period covered by the report, a non-governmental organisation issued a report that the (Egyptian) government coordinated and conducted joint operations with a militia in the Sinai Peninsula that allegedly recruited and used children, including the involvement of some of them to launch attacks directly”.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Overall Picture of Education in Egypt and North Sinai**

The issue of education in North Sinai, despite the uniqueness and severity of the violations and attacks that schools have endured and their military use, cannot be viewed in isolation from the deterioration of the education system in Egypt as a whole. In terms of expenditure on education, the government has continued to disregard the constitutional provision that mandates allocating 6% of the total national income for education spending (4% for pre-university education and 2% for higher education), with these percentages gradually increasing to align with international standards, by the fiscal year 2016-2017, according to the constitution.

Allocations for the education sector are only approximately 230 billion Egyptian pounds, representing just about 2% of the expected local gross domestic product for the fiscal year 2023/2024 (11.8 trillion pounds), which means that education allocations represent only one-third of the percentage stipulated in the constitution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> US Department of State, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, September 15, 2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>8</sup> US Department of State, EGYPT (Tier 2 Watch List, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, September 15, 2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/egypt>

<sup>9</sup> Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, For the First Time: the President Acknowledges the Government's Disregard for the Constitutional Ratios of Education and Health, June 17, 2023. (Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://shorturl.at/qADM3>



President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi made an unprecedented statement on Wednesday, June 14, 2023, regarding the budgets for education and health, stating that the necessary budgets for spending on health and education, as per the constitutional entitlement, are not available, saying, "The required figures are not available, folks, and we all need to remain present in the real world."<sup>10</sup> This prompted the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights to demand, in response to this statement, that the president's acknowledgment be a starting point for a solution and holding accountable those who have ignored the issue, and a commitment to gradually meet the constitutional percentages.<sup>11</sup>

The president's statements confirming that the government does not adhere to the constitution, even at a minimum, with regard to public spending on education and health, came just two days after the finance minister confirmed the opposite to the House of Representatives. On April 12, 2023, Finance Minister Mohammed Maait stood in the council, as his annual custom, to confirm that the government is committed to the constitutional minimum ratios for education and health: "we are committed to the constitutional benefits ratios, and no duplication has been taken into account in calculating expenses. The state's general budget meets not only domestic, but also international standards in preparing budgets".<sup>12</sup>

The day after the minister's speech under the dome, the parliament voted to approve the general budget submitted to it, despite its violation of the applicable Constitution issued in 2014. After many years of the government circumventing its constitutional responsibility towards the education sector, it is necessary to reconsider the government's financial policies, spending priorities and the specificity of historically marginalized regions such as North Sinai.

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<sup>10</sup> Statements by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi during the National Youth Conference, Extra News Channel, June 14, 2023. (Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xh14duf0A6A>

<sup>11</sup> Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, For the First Time: the President Acknowledges the Government's Disregard for the Constitutional Ratios of Education and Health, June 17, 2023. (Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://shorturl.at/qADM3>

<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Gharib, Minister of Finance denies violating the Constitution in allocations of education and health in the general budget, Al-Masry Al-Youm, June 12, 2023. (Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2909179>



## Formal and Inadequate Processing

Despite the historical marginalization to which North Sinai has been subjected, the government has not provided clear programs and plans regarding the provision of educational services, especially in the post-war years. On the contrary, the government's statements generally reflected inadequate plans and persistent attempts to hide the deteriorating reality. For example, in October 2021, at the beginning of the new academic year, local media quoted Hamza Radwan, undersecretary of the Ministry of education in North Sinai, as saying that "all schools in the governorate are fully operational today" on the first day of school, as the press report claimed. Based on government data, studies have been organized in North Sinai and "there have been no problems or obstacles witnessed," as the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education confirmed that a total of 11,165 students in primary, preparatory, and secondary levels have enrolled in 449 schools.<sup>13</sup> The following year, in October 2022, Mr. Radwan stated that the number of students had reached about 120 thousand at various academic levels, and that the number of schools reached 652 schools, which means an increase in the number of schools operating in North Sinai by 203 schools, compared to the previous year, despite the fact that more than 130 schools in North Sinai were out of work according to the evidence collected by the report, which means that official statements contradict reality.<sup>14</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the announced government figures on the number of schools actually located in North Sinai involve some exaggeration, as the foundation has monitored a number of schools mentioned by the published government data as separate schools, while the reality and the foundation's research prove that these schools are located within the same educational building and that these statements are most likely aimed at embellishing the truth. An example is Al-Farouk Omar School in Rafah, which is a single three-story building. Official data from the Ministry of Education mentions it as two

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<sup>13</sup> Hussein Ibrahim: "The Regularity of Studying in all Schools of North Sinai.. 110,165 students in 449 schools", Al-Watan newspaper, October 10, 2021.

(Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5737399>

<sup>14</sup> Khaled Mohammed: "Students Begin to Influx to Schools in North Sinai", Al-Masry Al-Youm, October 2, 2022.

(Visited on September 3, 2023). <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2705574>





schools: Al-Farouk Omar School for Basic Education and Al-Farouk Omar Secondary School.<sup>15</sup>

It is clear from these rosy and conflicting statements that in the years of the hidden war in North Sinai and beyond, the Egyptian authorities relied on mobilization and propaganda means. Instead of revealing and announcing the truth and starting serious programs to address the education crisis in the cities of North Sinai, the state adopted methods and approaches contrary to reality. Theoretically, authorities facilitated a series of actions that were mostly fictitious, and did not contribute to maintaining the educational achievement of school students. For example, the governorate has enrolled children in areas that have been subjected to forced displacement in alternative schools, and announced easing the procedures for holding tests by allowing students to perform them in any other school inside North Sinai instead of schools where studies have been disrupted.

To demonstrate the success of this policy, the state authorities were more careful to announce figures that do not reflect reality, such as the numbers of students who passed their exams at alternative schools, rather than actually compensating children for missing lessons.<sup>16</sup> The result was the continuation of formal success and the transfer of quite a few students to subsequent classes, while their parents and teachers say that they are not good at reading or writing, as the tests were only formal. If we take into account, in addition to this, the increase in dropouts and the eventual withdrawal from education, especially among girls, we have learned how alarming the future of Sinai's children and youth is, and how alarming the educational conditions are in the foreseeable future of North Sinai.

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<sup>15</sup>See the Egyptian Schools Guide, Ministry of Education, date of visit (September 3, 2023):

<https://search.emis.gov.eg/>

<sup>16</sup> For example, North Sinai Governorate said that 100% of the 1,417 male and female students had successfully passed the exams of the second round of the preparatory certificate in 2023, Facebook page of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education in North Sinai, August 1, 2023, (Visited on September 3, 2023).

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid029yi2eZETLFQFKHs8MRKF9MVeNu4tRP5pgYHopeHPTKWQ31hm2kKpX99cvBXXfbNBI&id=100063502729327](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid029yi2eZETLFQFKHs8MRKF9MVeNu4tRP5pgYHopeHPTKWQ31hm2kKpX99cvBXXfbNBI&id=100063502729327)



## II. Methodology

Despite the dramatic decline in military operations inside Sinai, and the eradication of the “Sinai Province” armed group since 2022, the Egyptian authorities still prohibit the work and movement of independent media and human rights organizations within the Sinai Peninsula almost absolutely, as the years of armed conflict witnessed a significant increase in concealment of what was happening and increase in security obstacles with the aim of preventing publication, or simply obtaining independent and credible information about what was happening in Sinai, and even more, just talking to local residents and victims of violations and conveying their experiences, testimonies and suffering.

It took 18 months to prepare this research, from June 2022 to December 2023. This report documents violations and attacks against education in North Sinai Governorate during the period from September 2013 to December 2023. While preparing this report, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights was able to conduct interviews with dozens of local residents, teachers, and some government employees working in local educational departments in the cities of North Sinai Governorate, in order to document violations from people with direct experience. The pre-prepared interviews, the content of which was transcribed into spreadsheets and questionnaires, amounted to 63 direct in-person interviews, in addition to many spontaneous interviews that took place during field visits to villages and communities in North Sinai.

Sinai Foundation for Human Rights team was also able to conduct a periodic field inspection in most villages in the cities of Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish, Bir al-Abd and Al-Hassana, during which the team was able to inspect the violations and their extended effects on educational facilities, and collect the coordinates of 135 schools and educational institutions that were subjected to violations. The foundation's team was also able to capture exclusive photographic materials for dozens of schools in the cities of North Sinai governorate in order to prepare a database and an interactive map that will be published



with this report as a complement to it and as an open source, reflecting the truth to government officials, as well as researchers and journalists.<sup>17</sup>

The interviews conducted during the preparation of this report covered the most prominent violations that occurred with regard to the right to education mainly during the ten years between 2013 and 2023. All the testimonies contained in this report were obtained through direct interviews, whether face-to-face or remotely through various communication platforms and text messages. The names of witnesses, their personal data, and some other information were withheld to preserve their personal security for fear of being subjected to abuse by the Egyptian authorities.

The foundation also reviewed the official textual and spoken statements issued by various officials regarding the right to education during the research period, including statements by President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the military spokesman, the official spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior, members of the House of Representatives and senate for North Sinai, the governor of North Sinai, and others responsible for the educational process in North Sinai. The foundation also reviewed some written statements and video releases issued by the "Sinai province" group.

The foundation tried to include the government's point of view in this report by communicating with people of several ranks of the Egyptian authorities, but did not receive any responses until the moment the report was published. On two occasions during the research period, the foundation sent letters by fax to the minister of Defense, the minister of education, the chairman of the Education Committee of the House of Representatives, the governor of North Sinai, the undersecretary of the Ministry of education in North Sinai and the chairman of the National Council for Human Rights.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Explore the map prepared by SFHR, showing coordinates, violation categories and exclusive footages: <https://sinaifhr.org/educationmap/>

<sup>18</sup> See annexes to this report.





The Foundation reviewed brief recommendations contained in a 12-page report issued by the National Council for Human Rights.<sup>19</sup> This report was published following the dispatch of a fact - finding mission, which visited the North Sinai governorate between January 31 and February 4, 2021. The foundation also reviewed a government report issued on June 27, 2020 which addressed the efforts made by the authorities to compensate those affected by the security confrontations between the parties to the conflict in North Sinai during the period from October 1, 2015 to May 31, 2020.<sup>20</sup> In addition, a legal study was reviewed entitled "Human Rights and countering terrorist groups", prepared by the vice president of the court of Cassation, counselor Adel Maged, and issued by the State Information Service, an Egyptian government body affiliated with the office of presidency, which addressed the status of human rights in the "Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018".<sup>21</sup>

In many cases, the researchers of Sinai Foundation for Human Rights were able to obtain exclusive documents issued by the Ministry of education and the Directorate of education in North Sinai, as well as review exclusive reports issued by the Falling Facilities Committee of the North Sinai governorate, which is tasked with assessing the condition of educational facilities damaged during the armed conflict.<sup>22</sup> The foundation also analyzed a number of videos that appeared on various social media platforms that publish photos, videos and local comments from Sinai, as well as dozens of news and analytical articles, social media posts of Sinai activists, and government officials.

In estimating the figures of victims from students or teachers during the research period, the foundation relied on personal interviews, the foundation's monitoring archive, as well as published Press reports. Most of these victims did not fall directly in attacks on educational facilities, but rather as a result of the military operations that targeted their

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<sup>19</sup> Wael Ali, Al-Masry Al-Youm publishes the National Human Rights Report on North Sinai, Al-Masry Al-Youm, February 10, 2021: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2253991>

<sup>20</sup> Madbouly reviews a report on compensation for those affected by the security confrontations in North Sinai, State Information Service, June 27, 2020:

<https://sis.gov.eg/Story/205085?lang=ar> -تقريراً بشأن تعويض المتضررين من المواجهات الأمنية في شمال سيناء

<sup>21</sup> Counselor Adel Maged, Human Rights and Confrontation, for the journal "Studies in Human Rights," July 11, 2018:

<https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/169667?lang=ar> -هيئة الاستعلامات العملية الشاملة في سيناء - نموذج في الالتزام بحقوق الإنسان

<sup>22</sup> See annexes to this report.



villages. The numbers of students represent children from 6 to 18 years old, and victims of children under 6 years old were excluded, as the report focuses on children of primary and secondary school age.

The schools covered by the research are government schools under the Ministry of Education. Schools and institutes affiliated to Al-Azhar Al-Sharif have been excluded, despite the fact that a large number of them were demolished during the armed conflict, and they share the same types of violations and attacks as the schools of the Ministry of Education. Also, the research did not address traditional informal patterns of education, such as Katateeb (Quran schools) to some mosques and Sufi Zawiyas, although they are one of the civil establishments that are included in the definitions of “schools”, according to the human rights and legal framework of reference for the report.

## **Evidence Verification**

### **First: visual content**

The “Digital Investigations Laboratory” at Sinai Foundation for Human Rights subjected each piece of photographic material included in the investigation to analysis and verification techniques, as well as comparing it with the laboratory’s analysis of open-source maps from multiple sources, all to determine the geographic location and timeline of attacks and violations in each educational building or school, and how long this violation lasted.

The report provides examples of this comparison within case studies to demonstrate the methodology of the documented violations, but the report did not provide all the visual materials and images that were analyzed, and only published a large part of this evidence within the interactive map complementary to this report. The case studies published in the report show how this or that school was proven to have been deliberately misused by the army or Sinai Province militants or was attacked.



## **Second: geospatial analysis**

The exclusive photographic materials collected by the foundation's team, as well as the available images that can be found through "Google Earth Pro", were an essential step in identifying the changes and conditions that each school has undergone since 2013 until today, after being able to collect the coordinates of 135 violated schools.

Geospatial analysis using the available images helped to determine the type of attacks, whether they were demolitions, military use or other violations. Under each case study examined by the foundation, there is an explanation of how any set of conclusions were reached, supported by a number of visual materials.

## **III. Legal Framework**

### **Law of Armed Conflict (International Humanitarian Law)**

International humanitarian law and International Human Rights Law clarify the legal norms governing issues related to the protection of schools, the educational process and civilians in general during armed conflicts. Egypt is a state party to two human rights charters establishing the right to education in international law: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They acknowledge that states should make primary education free and compulsory, and secondary education generally available. Governments have obligations to ensure that these fundamental rights are fulfilled. While armed groups are not formally bound by international human rights law, those who have effective control over civilian areas are bound by international humanitarian law to protect all civilian objects and seek consistency with international human rights law. International humanitarian law, which is based on the four Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols, requires both governments and armed groups to ensure the protection of students, teachers and educational institutions, and to ensure safe access to schools. This is mainly due to the civil nature of the elements of the educational process, and therefore their inviolability is entrenched, and they must be protected. However, there are other international efforts aimed at ensuring the continuation





of the educational process in times of armed conflict, not only because of their protection as civilian entities, but also because of the broader understanding that school education plays a major role in strengthening the immunity of societies from factors leading to armed conflict, such as extremism and poverty, and also plays an important role in the reintegration and rehabilitation of young people during and after wars. Among those efforts, for example, is the "Safe Schools Declaration" signed by 177 countries.<sup>23</sup>

On the issue of education in emergencies, the UN Special Rapporteur on education said: "Security in schools, meaning not only physical, psychological and emotional safety, but also uninterrupted education in conditions conducive to knowledge acquisition and character development, forms part of the right to education. This means that States have a responsibility to punish the perpetrators and devise effective methods of protection. During times of conflict, teachers, students and parents become targets of violence. Parents keep their children at home to avoid the risks involved in the trip to and from school."<sup>24</sup>

One of the fundamental principles of the laws of war is that the parties must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives. Attacks can only be directed at militants and military targets.<sup>25</sup> Any attacks on civilians are considered legally acceptable only when they are directly involved in hostilities, and no more during this period of their participation. If there are doubts whether a person is a civilian or a fighter, the person must be considered a civilian.<sup>26</sup> Deliberate, direct attacks directed against such installations, at times when they are not considered legitimate military targets, constitute a war crime.

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<sup>23</sup> "The Safe Schools Declaration," Protecting Education, accessed September 13, 2023, <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>.

<sup>24</sup> UN Human Rights Council, "Right to education in emergency situations: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Muñoz," May 20, 2008, A/HRC/8/10

<sup>25</sup> See International Committee of the Red Cross: customary international humanitarian law, Rule 7, quoting from the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (protocol I). Articles 48 and 52(2).

<sup>26</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, Rule 6, quoting from protocol I Article 50 (1). Some countries have expressed reservations about the military implications of the specific firm interpretation of this rule. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross: "when there is doubt, a thorough assessment should be carried out to see if there are sufficient indications that an attack could be allowed. One cannot attack anyone who seems in doubt of his status and character". Previous, pp. 23-24.



Military Objectives are defined as those objects that effectively contribute to military action, either by their nature, location, purpose, or use, and whose total or partial destruction, capture, or deactivation, in the circumstances prevailing at the time, offers a definite military advantage. When there is doubt about whether specific civilian objects such as schools or universities are being used to make an effective contribution to military action, they should be treated as civilian objects until clear evidence to the contrary is established.

International humanitarian law obliges parties to a conflict to take precautions in dealing with the consequences of an attack. To the extent that schools and universities are civilian objects, the parties to the armed conflict should take into consideration the following:

- A) Avoid placing military targets in populated areas, including near schools and universities.
- B) Strive to remove the civilian population or civilian objects under its control away from the areas adjacent to military objectives.
- C) Take other necessary precautions to protect schools and universities under their control from the dangers resulting from military operations.

Converting a school or university into a military objective (e.g., by using it as barracks for troops) exposes it to the possibility of attack by the adversary, which may be lawful in the context of armed conflicts in that case. Additionally, positioning military objectives (such as weapon storage) near schools and universities also increases the risk of accidental damage resulting from an attack on nearby military objectives.

According to the customary international humanitarian law study released by the International Committee of the Red Cross, schools and universities undoubtedly benefit from protective measures due to their status as cultural civilian property under customary law. Article 38 of the International Committee of the Red Cross study reflects the assessment that each party to a conflict must respect and protect educational buildings, which fall under cultural property. This entails a duty to give special attention to avoiding



damage to educational buildings (unless they are military objectives) and prohibiting any intentional seizure, destruction, or intentional damage to educational institutions.<sup>27</sup>

These rules mentioned above should be interpreted in a specific context. Other relevant rules and principles in the law of armed conflicts must also be considered. Among these rules are those that provide special protection for children in armed conflict situations. If educational institutions are used wholly or partially for military purposes, the lives and physical well-being of children may be at risk, and access to education may be restricted or hindered either because children are afraid to go to school out of fear of being killed or injured in an attack by enemy forces or because they are deprived of their usual educational buildings and facilities.

In other words, even if schools are turned into military objectives due to their military use, the attack on them must not be random or disproportionate. Indiscriminate attacks are those not directed at a specific military objective or conducted without distinguishing between combatants and civilians. Disproportionate attacks are those where the expected loss of civilian lives and property is excessive compared to the expected military advantage gained from the attack.<sup>28</sup>

Under Additional Protocol II, applicable during non-international armed conflicts, it is a "fundamental guarantee" that children receive education, fulfilling the wishes of their parents. The presence of civilians-children, students, teachers, academics, school administrators, around the school and university should not be used to protect military targets from attack or to protect military operations.

Accordingly, prior to the military use of a school or university, it is imperative to consider all relevant rules and principles outlined in the laws of armed conflict, especially the obligation to take precautions against the effects of attacks, the special protection

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Marie Henckaerts et al., *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511804700>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Rule 14, quoting from protocol I, Articles 51 (5) (B) and 57 (2) (iii). In particular, this rule seems to apply in many cases in Sinai at times when the military forces have completely or partially demolished schools allegedly used by ISIS militants or may use them in the future, making such demolitions in the vast majority disproportionate and therefore illegal.



guaranteed to educational institutions as cultural property, the importance of ensuring access to education during armed conflicts, the prohibition of using human shields, and the special protection guaranteed to children in armed conflicts. Therefore, it is illegal to use a school for military purposes while simultaneously functioning as an educational center, which has occurred in many cases by both sides of the conflict in North Sinai, especially the government forces. The foundation has documented several instances where the army and police forces have employed various schools for military purposes while educational activities continued inside the school building with the presence of students inside. This involved establishing military outposts and sniper positions on the school rooftops and positioning military vehicles in the vicinity. For instance, schools like Jarada and Qabr Omair in Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish Advanced Industrial Technical School in Al-Arish, and the Mosaffaq Joint Preparatory School, Amouriya Primary School, and Martyr Hazem Salah for Elementary Education School in Bir Al-Abd have been used in this manner, exposing students and teachers to significant danger.

Individuals who intentionally commit grave violations of international humanitarian law should be pursued in both national and international courts on charges of war crimes. Among the war crimes listed in the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court is deliberately directing attacks against buildings designated for education, provided they are not military objectives.<sup>29</sup> Governments are always obligated to conduct transparent and independent investigations into alleged war crimes, even when the responsible parties are members of the armed forces, and to prosecute those individuals before the judiciary. Furthermore, non-state armed groups have a legal obligation to respect the laws of war, and therefore, they are responsible for ensuring that their leaders and fighters comply with the requirements of the laws of war. Since the war at the time of publishing this report in 2024 has significantly subsided, the Egyptian authorities bear a greater and more urgent responsibility to evacuate all schools that the military continues to use, and to investigate

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<sup>29</sup> UN General Assembly, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010)*, 17 July 1998, ISBN No. 92-9227-227-6, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3a84.html> [accessed 17 September 2023]





all potential crimes related to attacks on education, whether perpetrated by government forces, tribal militias supporting them, or members of the “Sinai Province” group affiliated with ISIS.

## **International Human Rights Law**

Many of the rules of International Human Rights law (applicable in a state of peace) also apply in a state of war. Among those rights that apply in all cases is the right to education. Many international human rights charters and treaties have emphasized the right to education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in December 1948, adopted for the first time the right to education, where Article 26 of the declaration stated that "everyone has the right to education," and the article stipulated that such education should be free at the primary and elementary level at least, provided that primary education should be compulsory. The declaration also emphasized the right to higher education and the need to make it available in accordance with the competencies of people.<sup>30</sup>

In December 1960, the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in education was issued to cover the right to education more broadly. In its third article, the Convention obliges states parties to repeal any legal provisions, instructions or administrative practices that include discrimination in education, whether on racial, religious, political, gender or other reasons of discrimination. In its first article, the convention states that discrimination in education includes denying persons access to any type or stage of education, as well as restricting persons to education at a lower level.<sup>31</sup>

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, issued in December 1966, clearly and unequivocally recognizes in Article 13 the right of everyone to education,

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<sup>30</sup> UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]

<sup>31</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Convention Against Discrimination in Education, 14 December 1960, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3880.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]



which is the basic reference in the International Bill of Human Rights regarding the right to education.<sup>32</sup>

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, issued in November 1989, in Article 28 obliges states parties to recognize the child's right to education. The convention also emphasizes in Article 3 (1) that all actions taken by official authorities concerning children must give first consideration to the best interests of the child.<sup>33</sup>

Other international treaties and conventions have emphasized the right to education for some groups in particular, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006, as well as the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families issued in 1990.<sup>34</sup>

In general comment No. 13 on the right to education, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, at its twenty-first meeting in 1999, provided a detailed explanation of the concept of the right to education and the obligations of states parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>35</sup>

General comments are one of the means by which the relevant human rights bodies provide authoritative interpretations that help states to better understand the texts of conventions

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<sup>32</sup> UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c0.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]

<sup>33</sup> UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]

<sup>34</sup> UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html> [accessed 13 September 2023];

UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]; UN General Assembly, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 18 December 1990, A/RES/45/158, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3980.html> [accessed 13 September 2023]

<sup>35</sup> General comments are one of the means by which the relevant human rights bodies provide authoritative interpretations that help states to better understand the texts of conventions and treaties. These bodies oversee the interpretation and application of treaties in a way that prevents their misinterpretation.



and treaties. According to the indicated general comment, education in all its forms and stages should have the following features:

A) Availability: states parties must provide educational institutions and programs in sufficient numbers, and there are some factors that help these institutions and programs to operate, for example, buildings, health facilities for both sexes, potable water, trained teachers with locally competitive salaries, teaching materials, while some of these institutions and programs will need facilities such as libraries, computers and Information Technology Facilities.

B) Accessibility: Educational institutions and programs should be accessible to everyone without discrimination. Accessibility and enrollment include three overlapping dimensions, the absence of any of which undermines them, namely: non-discrimination of students on illegal grounds, economic affordability, the third dimension is geographical and physical accessibility and means that the place providing educational service should be in a spatial range that is physically accessible either by attendance at a reasonably convenient location such as a school near residence, or through modern technology such as distance learning.

C) Acceptability: the form and content of education, including curricula and teaching methods, must be acceptable to students and, in appropriate cases, to parents, subject to the objectives required by Article 13 of the Covenant and the minimum educational standards that the state party may adopt.

D) Adaptability: education must be flexible in order to adapt to the needs of changing societies and respond to the needs of students in their diverse social and cultural environment.

General Comment No. 13 attached an explanation of some of the general legal obligations of states parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, stressing that the right to education, like all human rights, imposes three levels or types of obligations on states parties: the obligation to respect, the obligation to protect and the



obligation to fulfil. The obligation to fulfil incorporates two other obligations, namely, obligation to facilitate and obligation to provide.

The commentary interpreted the obligation to respect as requiring states parties to avoid measures that impede or prevent the enjoyment of the right to education. The obligation to protect has also been interpreted as requiring states parties to take measures to prevent other parties from interfering with the enjoyment of the right to education. The obligation to facilitate, which is included under the obligation to fulfil, requires states parties to take positive measures that enable and assist persons and communities to enjoy the right to education. This is especially true for vulnerable and marginalized communities and groups, if, for example, girls in a community have suffered marginalization for years, governments should take this into account and create programs that motivate families to send their girls to school. Finally, with regard to the obligation to provide, which is also included under the obligation to fulfil, it means that states parties are obliged to provide the right to education when a person or group is unable, for reasons beyond their control, to enjoy the right to education in its traditional form, such as individuals with disabilities.<sup>36</sup>

Most of these standards related to the right to education apply in times of war and armed conflict, and the authorities should take the necessary measures to maintain these standards as much as possible. As for the statements of Egyptian officials, including President al-Sisi, that the war in Sinai has come to an end, the responsibility is greater and clearer in ensuring the right to education as detailed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which practically entails the need for immediate unconditional evacuation of all schools used for military purposes, rebuilding destroyed schools and opening closed schools to students at the earliest opportunity.

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<sup>36</sup> CESCR General Comment No. 13: *The Right to Education* (Art. 13), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>.





## IV. Egyptian Government Violations of North Sinai Students' Right to Education

This part of the report documents the violations of the right to education in light of the ongoing armed conflict in North Sinai committed by the Egyptian authorities represented by the Ministry of education, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior during the period from 2013 to 2023. The armed forces in particular have played the biggest role in undermining the education infrastructure in the region, as over the years they have launched indiscriminate attacks that have led to casualties among students and members of educational bodies, as well as carried out many widespread and systematic violations, using dozens of schools for military purposes, bombing and blowing up dozens of schools, without clear or logical justification, leading to their destruction or closure to students.

Successive operations of forced displacement against the local population over the past decade in various areas of North Sinai governorate have also led to the closure of many schools for long periods of time. Previous violations have led to the creation of an inappropriate educational environment that has led to at least thousands, and probably tens of thousands, of students dropping out and depriving students of those schools of their right to education.

This section of the report also reveals that the Egyptian army recruited some children and used them in missions related to military operations against the Sinai province group, in addition to the recruitment of other children by armed tribal groups loyal to the Army who participated in hostilities against the group, which may have contributed to hindering these students from committing to their educational career.

During this period, the foundation observed a failure amounting to negligence on the part of the Egyptian government represented by the Ministry of education, where the government's plan to confront the widespread damage to which the education sector was exposed in North Sinai focused on formalities that do not take into account the best interests



of children, do not address the problem or reduce its effects, but rather focus clearly on concealing facts and not circulating information transparently. The foundation obtained a copy of a leaked official document issued by the Office of the minister of Education classified as an "important and urgent" letter issued on February 1, 2018, coinciding with the date of the army's launch of the Comprehensive Operation "Sinai 2018". The letter stated that "it is forbidden to collect and circulate any detailed data on the educational process (teachers - students - schools) in any form at the level of the Republic, and anyone who violates this will be subject to legal accountability".<sup>37</sup> This letter was sent again on January 29, 2023, specifically to the Directorate of education in North Sinai, following the Sinai foundation for Human Rights sending letters on January 25, 2023 to the minister of education, the minister of Defense and the governor of North Sinai, containing inquiries about violations related to the right to education in North Sinai.<sup>38</sup>

The foundation's researchers monitored the keenness of the Egyptian government to avoid any mention of schools destroyed or used militarily, but government officials, in their official statements about the numbers of operating schools and students attending schools, were keen to count the destroyed or closed schools among the schools that are operating normally. Some of the employees of the various educational departments in North Sinai governorate interviewed by the foundation also confirmed that they received strict security instructions not to communicate or deal with any press or human rights bodies, and not to make any statements regarding the numbers of students or schools, and confirmed that they received official instructions from the undersecretary of the Ministry of education in North Sinai, after his meeting with "security authorities", considering that the issue of closed or destroyed schools is a matter of national security that should not be made public, so as not to be used against Egypt within what the security services called "fifth generation wars".

The foundation has monitored the Egyptian authorities' reliance on propaganda tactics to address the education crisis in Sinai, facilitating, in theory, the enrollment of children in

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<sup>37</sup> See annexes to this report.

<sup>38</sup> See annexes to this report, annex No.1.



alternative schools, despite the ability of these children to attend these schools due to the displacement of their families or forced displacement to distant areas. The authorities also announced easing the procedures for holding tests by allowing students to take them at any other school inside North Sinai instead of schools where studies have been disrupted. To prove the success of this policy, the state authorities were more keen to announce figures showing the effectiveness of these decisions, such as the numbers of students who passed their exams at alternative schools, and not to actually compensate children for missing lessons. The result was the continuation of formal success and only on paper for thousands of students, whose parents and teachers say that they are not good at reading or writing, as the tests were only formal, and yet they continue to succeed and move to another level of study. If we take into account the previous effects, along with the increase in dropouts and eventual exit from education, especially among girls, it can be said that the future of these children and young people is worrying, especially in a region that has just emerged from an armed conflict. Lack of knowledge and ignorance at times were probably one of the main reasons that helped recruit followers from the local population.

The Sinai foundation for Human Rights also obtained an official document issued by the North Sinai Educational Administration showing the schools that stopped operating in 2016. The document pointed out that in 2016, 28 of the Sheikh Zuweid city schools had stopped working, including most of them primary and preparatory schools, and the document indicated that 24 of those schools stopped working for security reasons or because they were completely destroyed.<sup>39</sup>

The Sinai foundation for Human Rights has reviewed an official statement issued by the Rafah educational administration in North Sinai in the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022 explaining the transfer of examination committees of 17 preparatory schools from Rafah city schools to three committees in Al-Arish city schools and another committee in Sheikh Zuweid city, indicating the unsuitability of these schools for

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<sup>39</sup> See annexes to this report.



education.<sup>40</sup> Recently, for the first time since the outbreak of the armed conflict, the Ministry of education and Technical Education issued a statement in April 2023 in which it said that it had maintained and rehabilitated 9 schools in the "area of returning villages" - referring to the villages whose residents returned to after being displaced during the years of the armed conflict. The statement added that these schools are located in the areas of Bir Al-Abd and Sheikh Zuweid, areas where this part of the report documents that many schools were completely or almost completely destroyed after the bombing or demolition of the Armed Forces or the use of those schools for military purposes.<sup>41</sup>

## First: Attacks on students and members of educational Staff

Government forces, particularly the army, have been involved in attacks on students and members of the educational staff in various areas of North Sinai governorate, part of which the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights has managed to document. As a result of these attacks 186 students were killed and 268 others were injured, in addition to the killing of 21 educational staff members and the injury of 20 others between 2013 and 2023. Furthermore, several educational buildings have been damaged as a result of these attacks. The majority of victims in these violations were not directly targeted as part of the educational process or as students and teachers. Instead, they were casualties of indiscriminate attacks within the Sinai community carried out by elements of the army and police. The Foundation has documented such attacks in several reports during the war years.<sup>42</sup>

In fewer cases, these victims fell due to direct attacks in which government forces fired bullets or artillery shells at students or teachers, whether inside or near educational buildings or while they were traveling on buses carrying members of the educational staff. These attacks occurred as part of unlawful indiscriminate attacks or by mistake. Violations

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<sup>40</sup> See annexes to this report.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education reviews its efforts to expand and establish schools in North Sinai governorate, April 29, 2023. <https://moe.gov.eg/ar/what-s-on/news/efforts-to-expand/>

<sup>42</sup> Sinai foundation for Human Rights, Report "All We Want is to Live", interviews conducted by the foundation with a number of local residents in the period between 2019-2020: <https://sinaifhr.org//show/98>





also included raids and searches of educational buildings during the course of the school day, causing panic among students and teachers, affecting the educational process, which leads to students feeling insecure. Moreover, the educational process was disrupted during the years of the conflict by preventing teachers from reaching schools through closing roads, preventing their buses from passing, or stopping them at checkpoints for several hours.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mahmoud Khalil, Sinai teachers... Military barriers hinder the educational process, Alaraby Al-Jadeed, December 14, 2019: <https://shorturl.at/oARUW>



## The killing of student Nada Abu Akraa- 11 years old

The Sinai Foundation for Human Rights documented the incident of the killing of the child "Nada Ahmed Khamees Abu Akraa" an 11-year-old student in the sixth grade at Al-Zuhour Elementary School in the city of Al-Arish, by the bullets of the Egyptian army on October 22, 2016. According to eyewitnesses interviewed by the foundation, Nada was fatally shot in the head, while another child, Mahmoud Ahmed Ibrahim, was injured as a result of random gunfire by a soldier during a military campaign stationed in Al-Zuhour neighborhood at the end of the school day when students were leaving school. Local Facebook pages accused the army of killing the child, and a video was published showing the moment when ambulances arrived to transport the children to the hospital.<sup>44</sup>

*"On the morning of the incident, an army patrol arrived at Al-Zuhur neighborhood and parked an armored vehicle in front of the school gate until the children came out. As the children left through the gate, there was a soldier standing in front of the gate holding his weapon. Suddenly, the soldier fired a random shot, and the bullet hit 'Nada' in the head, killing her instantly and injuring another child. The soldier who killed her seemed almost in disbelief about what had happened. He fell to the ground next to Nada, clutching his head and pounding his face in shock. His comrades picked him up and put him in the armored vehicle. I will never forget that day, neither will my daughter, a friend of Nada who saw her lying on the ground covered in blood. A few minutes later, the officer in charge of the patrol arrived at the school, and people were shouting loudly. We told the officer, "Are you here to protect us or to kill us? Did this soldier miss his target or did he see a terrorist? Why did he shoot when the children were leaving school?" The officer's response was that the soldier would be held accountable.*

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<sup>44</sup> Posted on the "khawater Sinawi" Facebook page, October 22, 2016, (Accessed September 3, 2023).  
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1119427681487294&ref=sharing>



*The hardest scene was when Nada's parents arrived. Her father held her, lay down on her body, and fainted. Her mother screamed loudly, embracing Nada and her blood".*

## **Attack on Student Bus**

In a shocking incident that occurred on August 10, 2020, non-adult students from the Otallah Suleiman Zayed Agricultural Secondary School became victims while heading to take their end-of-year exams.<sup>45</sup> The presence of “Sinai Province” members in several villages near the city of Bir Al-Abd in July 2020 led to the displacement of residents from these villages. As a result, the authorities in North Sinai Governorate announced a change in the location of the exams for the third-year students from Otallah Suleiman Zayed Agricultural Secondary School to another school in the village of Nagila.<sup>46</sup>

When the students' bus passed near one of the military checkpoints, a military force shot on them in the area between the villages of Al-Humaisah and Abu Jloud, southwest of the city of Bir Al-Abd.<sup>47</sup> A medical source revealed to the Sinai Foundation that an ambulance transported 4 students, one of whom was taken to the hospital dead, followed by another a few days later. Two other students suffered from various injuries.

## **Casualties:**

(1) Ahmed El-Sayed Abdelaziz, 16 years old.

(2) Alaa Nasr Selmy, 16 years old.

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<sup>45</sup> "ISIS" is heading west: Bir Al-Abd villages talk about displacement, Al-Manasa, August 23, 2020: <https://almanassa.com/stories/4581>

<sup>46</sup> An announcement published by the official page of North Sinai governorate to transfer the headquarters of exams for students of the Awtallah Suleiman Zayed School, July 23, 2020: <https://www.facebook.com/northsinaiportal/posts/3557236514334181>

<sup>47</sup> "All We Want is to Live," Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, September 23, 2021:



## Injured:

(1) Mahmoud Mahni Suleiman, 16 years old.

(2) Esraa Ibrahim Hassan, 16 years old."

One of the surviving students from the bus attack recounted:

*"It was the end-of-year exams of a school that is located in the village of Nagila, which is part of the city of Bir Al-Abd. On the morning of the incident, we were traveling on a secondary road after passing the village of Al-Humaisah, heading to Nagila to take our exams. We heard the sound of shelling and gunfire from a distance, coming from the direction of the village of Qatiya. People in the minibus were saying that the army was shelling the locations of the terrorists who had taken control of the villages of Qatiya, Iqtiya, Al-Janayen, and Al-Marih. Suddenly, we found bullets raining down on us, just like rain. At that moment, no one knew what was happening. I tried to take cover from the bullets under the seat. Blood was flowing like a waterfall, and my face was covered with it. After the car stopped next to a house on the road, we quickly got out. We saw a military force nearby that was suspicious of the minibus and started shooting at us without trying to stop us. Those moments were tough and terrifying that felt like a year. The ambulance arrived an hour later and transported the injured, but unfortunately, they continued to bleed in front of our eyes, and we couldn't do anything for them. One of our friends died before the ambulance arrived, and the other passed away in the hospital..."*





## Artillery Bombardment of a School While the Children Were Inside

Al-Farouk Omar School was subjected to artillery shelling and heavy gunfire while students were inside the classroom. The last floor was damaged by shells while bullets hit the windows of the classroom in which the students were present, according to a teacher at the school who witnessed the incident.

*“In the academic year 2015/2016, I was in school along with about 18 students. Due to the war circumstances, the number of students attending was not large. There was a military crackdown with tanks and Hummer vehicles around the village of Al-Masura. While I was teaching the students, suddenly the school was hit with intense gunfire, approximately two shells from a tank on the floor above us. The building shook as if it were an earthquake, and we were all panicked and terrified. I can't describe to you how the children were feeling.*

*We lay down on the ground, and the children were scared and crying. I hugged two of them and tried to comfort the others. I felt that death was closer to us than the classroom door. After a while, I gathered myself and decided to take the students to the other side of the building opposite to where the gunfire was coming from. There was no firing from that direction, so we climbed out of the windows on the southern side of the school so that no one would see us. We went down and entered an olive grove, where we lay on the ground until the gunfire subsided and we felt a bit safer. Then we went back to our homes.*

*After that day, none of the students returned to school, and the building became a constant target for artillery shells until the school was completely demolished in 2018”.*



## **Killing of Teacher Khaled El-Safti**

Among the teachers who were killed by gunfire indiscriminately between civilians from the armed forces was the teacher Khaled Al-Sayyid Abdel Aziz El-Safti, 51 years old, as reported by one of his fellow teachers. He was killed on May 11, 2016. According to one of Khaled's colleagues, he served as the head of the examination committee at Abu Al-Araj School, south of Sheikh Zuweid. On the morning of his murder, he was in a car with his colleagues to deliver examination papers to the examination committee at the school. A military checkpoint stopped the car on the outskirts of the Tarabin neighborhood and allowed it to pass. However, according to the teacher who was in the same car, less than a kilometer away, the car came under heavy gunfire from another military checkpoint in the Tarabin neighborhood, as the checkpoint personnel suspected that the car was carrying armed individuals.<sup>48</sup>

## **Teacher / Hussein Salama Salem was injured as a result of artillery shelling near the school**

The foundation also documented the injury of teacher Hussein Salama Salem Reyashat, 33 years old, by shrapnel on February 28, 2021, near his workplace at Al-Khansaa Preparatory School located in Abu Zarai neighborhood of Sheikh Zuweid.

A resident of the neighborhood informed the foundation that the shrapnel had struck the teacher as a result of a shell falling near the school building, most likely fired by a tank belonging to the Egyptian army from one of the military bases in the village of Al-Goura.<sup>49</sup>

*"... Its fragments hit Mr. Hussein Salama Salem in his hand while he was standing in the schoolyard with his colleagues. They immediately*

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<sup>48</sup> A Facebook post of a local news page "Khawater Sinawi" on November 11, 2016, the news and the comments of the residents below it match the testimonies obtained by the foundation:

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid09vHCRXV6N1TDfGyEACfqMa5yaqnhxVgvqCYShQ7HPUFAtfC6mNwVpdszZwJ189XEI&id=505737276189674](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid09vHCRXV6N1TDfGyEACfqMa5yaqnhxVgvqCYShQ7HPUFAtfC6mNwVpdszZwJ189XEI&id=505737276189674)

<sup>49</sup> Explosive Return, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, July 25, 2022:

<https://sinaifhr.org/show/143>



*transferred him to Sheikh Zuweid Hospital. The shrapnel had broken his hand. Fortunately, there were no students at the school at that time. It was the beginning of the school year for girls due to the exams, which means that the shell could have caused a massacre, God forbid".*

- The source added for the foundation.

## **School Raid While Children Were Present**

The army's attacks on schools varied and included raids on some schools for inspection while students were inside. The foundation documented the storming of Al-Kanana Language School, located in the city of Al-Arish, in February 2017 by army forces. According to the mother of one of the students at the school, an army officer, along with several soldiers, stormed the school, causing panic among the students inside. The mother stated that the army personnel searched the school in search of members affiliated with the Sinai Province group. She added that a month before this incident, during one of the repeated security campaigns, army personnel prevented buses carrying students from leaving the school after the end of the school day for over an hour. This increased the parents' concerns about their children, especially since they couldn't contact them due to the jamming devices carried by the army personnel and the cutting of communication networks in Al-Arish for security reasons.

*“Three tanks were present, one in the neighborhood opposite the school gate (approximately 10 meters away), another towards the ring road (approximately 20 meters from the school gate), and one at the first street of the school (approximately 100 meters away). They also had jamming vehicles, military vehicles, and the school was in the middle. We don't care about their locations, but what matters is that the officer and several soldiers entered the school premises, and one soldier even went up to the school's rooftop to secure the area. It's such a terrifying situation that the children experienced. The school owner is a well-*



*known man who is not involved in politics, and he has more than one school, including one in the suburbs and the computer institute. So, it doesn't make sense for them to hide terrorists in the kindergarten. The idea of entering the school itself is terrifying. Would any of the officers who entered the school allow someone to enter a school where their children are present in this way?" The student's mother added about the incident of the school inspection by the army personnel.*

## Second: Bombing and Demolition of Schools

The Egyptian army violated the right of North Sinai students to education by launching repeated artillery or aerial bombardment attacks on schools or completely demolishing them, a violation that could amount to a war crime in accordance with the international humanitarian law and the Rome convention establishing the International Criminal Court. The army forces also violated the rules stipulated by international humanitarian law, which require parties to the conflict to take the necessary precautions to protect schools from the dangers caused by military operations.

According to a monitoring process conducted by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights of attacks on schools, whether by aerial bombardment, artillery, or direct demolition, the foundation recorded 386 attacks on educational facilities in addition to the demolition of 73 schools in five cities in North Sinai governorate in the period from 2013 to 2023.

### **Attacks within this framework are divided into three types:**

**A- The first type:** Deliberate aerial and artillery bombardment to demolish the educational building:

According to the foundation's documentation and interviews conducted with dozens of local residents, the army's attacks against schools were sometimes apparently aimed at





depriving the Sinai province group of using those schools as hideouts or fulcrums for attack and observation, as school buildings are often distinguished by being the highest point in the villages located in them.<sup>50</sup> According to eyewitness testimonies and security studies, during the period of its activity in Sinai, the organization did not base its military strategy on taking fixed positions inside those schools, but rather relied on the hit-and-run tactic. Also, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights did not monitor through its interviews, press reports or security studies that indicate that schools or other fixed locations were occupied by ISIS members for more than a few minutes or a few hours in anticipation of their aerial targeting by the army.<sup>51</sup>

Consequently, the army forces attacked many schools proactively at times, and at other times these attacks were carried out while those schools were not actually being used militarily by the Sinai province group, and the attack on them does not meet the conditional definition in international law as a legitimate military objective, and the government forces could have resorted to many other alternative solutions to secure those educational buildings before resorting to their destruction.<sup>52</sup> This significantly indicates that these attacks, bombardments and demolitions have explicitly violated the rules of international humanitarian law, which oblige the forces to take all possible alternative measures before attacking these schools, including warning the enemy in advance that the facility will be attacked unless it ceases to be used, unless the existing circumstances impede this.

**B- The second type:** In other cases, the army targeted targets adjacent to schools, but also affected school buildings as accidental damage. In these cases, the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights is unable to determine whether the attacks are legal or not, as determining this includes obtaining information that is not available about the extent of the presence of

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<sup>50</sup> The report discusses these types of attacks in the section on the legal framework, and concludes that most of them are probably illegal as they were mostly unnecessary and disproportionate in relation to attacking a civilian target used by the adversary for military purposes.

<sup>51</sup> Ashour, O. (2016). *ISIS and Sinai Province: Complex Networks of Insurgency under Authoritarian Rule*. (DGAP kompakt, 15). Berlin: Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V.. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-54270-3>

<sup>52</sup> See the legal framework section.



the military target near the school, the military advantage obtained by the attack, and the severity and extent of the accidental damage to the school and to the teachers and students who attend it. For example, theoretically, targeting a military cell of the Sinai Province group may be legitimate if it results in damage to the educational building outside school hours when it is thought to be empty of students and teachers, and targeting the same cell may be illegal if it would result in a large number of injuries and deaths among students and teachers during school days.

**C- The third type:** In other cases, the army bombed or demolished schools, as part of a large-scale demolition and destruction operation within residential centers, with the aim of forcing locals of the area to leave them. These attacks, in turn, are a serious violation of human rights and the norms of international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes.<sup>53</sup>

In the following pages, the report discusses some case studies, divided according to the five major cities in North Sinai that the report examined.

## A) Rafah City

Rafah City had early become a flashpoint for armed confrontations between elements of extremist armed groups and Egyptian security forces.<sup>54</sup> The escalation of attacks and military operations dramatically increased after the army's intervention to overthrow President Mohamed Morsi in Cairo and after the Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis group pledged allegiance to ISIS, renaming itself "Sinai Province". President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi issued Decree No. 444 for the year 2014 to establish a "buffer zone" with a depth of five kilometers along the border with the Gaza Strip.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Egypt: Massive Sinai Demolitions... Likely War Crimes", March 17, 2021, (Accessed September 3, 2023):

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/17/egypt-massive-sinai-demolitions-likely-war-crimes>

<sup>54</sup> For example, in August 2012, armed elements targeted an Egyptian border post in the city of Rafah and the attack resulted in the death of 16 Egyptian military personnel, and this resulted in the launch of a counter-operation of the Egyptian army inside the Sinai under the name of Operation Eagle 2.

<sup>55</sup> Since the "removal" of Morsi.. The most prominent attacks of "Ansar Bait al-Maqdis" on the Egyptian army in Sinai, CNN Arabic, January 30, 2015:



The demolition operations had already begun in 2013, although not officially announced. However, the decree led to the evacuation of nearly the entire Egyptian city of Rafah within about two years and its erasure from existence within around three years.<sup>56</sup> Within the buffer zone, the army carried out complete demolitions of 23 school buildings in villages affiliated with Rafah City, including 18 schools for elementary education and 5 high schools. Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, as well as other human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, found that the widespread demolition and forced displacement operations in Sinai were mostly illegal, with Human Rights Watch stating that many of them amounted to war crimes.<sup>57</sup>

Outside the buffer zone, the situation did not differ much. During the armed conflict, the foundation documented numerous military attacks by the Egyptian army that destroyed 15 schools located in Rafah City or its affiliated villages, all of them are schools for elementary education. These attacks resulted in the complete or partial destruction of these schools.

Furthermore, education in all villages of Rafah was significantly affected due to the prevention of teachers from reaching their schools, resulting from road closures or being detained at military checkpoints.<sup>58</sup>

The following examples illustrate five case studies of schools located within the scope of Rafah City but outside the buffer zone. This reveals, through compelling evidence, the Army's pattern of destroying numerous schools without legitimacy or legal justification.

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<https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/01/30/egypt-sinai-attack>

<sup>56</sup> For more, see Human Rights Watch report, "Look for Another Homeland: Forced Evictions in Egypt's Rafah," September 22, 2015.

(Accessed September 3, 2023) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/22/look-another-homeland/forced-evictions-egypts-rafah>

<sup>57</sup> See for example: "Look for Another Homeland," previously mentioned, and "Egypt: Army Intensifies Sinai Home Demolitions," Human Rights Watch, May 22, 2018.

(Accessed September 3, 2023). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/22/egypt-army-intensifies-sinai-home-demolitions>

<sup>58</sup> Mohammed Hussein, students of Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah are in the crossfire armed with education.. They defy the war on terror in their regions and attend school.. And they are traveling tens of kilometers on their feet to reach steadfast schools and classrooms in houses and corners, Al-Youm Al-Sabea, December 15, 2015: <https://shorturl.at/bwCYO>





## Naga' Sheibana Primary School and Naga' Sheibana Preparatory School

These two schools are located in the village of Naga' Sheibana south of Rafah City. Before the demolition of these schools, the educational process was significantly disrupted from 2015 to 2017. For example, reports in 2017 documented that teachers from Sheikh Zuweid and Al-Arish were unable to reach their schools due to the army's closure of the road for more than 90 consecutive days. This led to the closure of 17 schools in southern Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah, including schools in the village of Naga' Sheibana.<sup>59</sup>

Both schools were subjected to artillery shelling at the end of 2017 and then were subjected to aerial bombardment by the Egyptian Armed Forces during 2018, according to interviews conducted by the foundation with three residents of the village. According to open-source satellite images, both schools are shown to have been completely destroyed between January and August 2018. To verify the destruction, the Sinai Foundation compared images of schools from August 2018, with an earlier satellite image in 2017.



Image 1: Satellite images showing the two schools before the destruction (on the left) and after the destruction (on the right).

<sup>59</sup> Mohammed Hussein, learn about the story of 7 villages in Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah raising the steadfast logo in front of the decline of services, Al-Youm Al-Sabea, March 18, 2017:

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/3/18/%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%A9-7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AD-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1/3148177>





Some footage from an exclusive video in 2023 shows that the two schools have been almost completely destroyed. Part of the school's sign can also be seen in one of these shots.



Image 2: Part of the primary school sign can be seen on the side of the destroyed building.

Despite the massive destruction caused to the school, the foundation was able to determine the geographical location of the primary school building and match it with that found in the satellite images precisely by matching the shape of the destruction caused to the school with an exclusive video obtained by the foundation through a field visit.



Image 3: Determining the geolocation of the primary school by comparing an image of the school obtained by the foundation with satellite images.





The following shot, obtained by the foundation from an exclusive video captured during a field visit in 2023, depicts both schools in a state of destruction. Similarly, this shot aided in pinpointing the geographical location of the Naga' Sheibana Preparatory School by comparing the actual collapsed building, the southern wall, and a small building at the edge of the school with satellite images.



Image 4: Image of the actual dilapidated building, the south wall and a small building on the edge of the school.



Image 5: Satellite shot showing the actual dilapidated building, the southern wall, and a small building on the edge of the school.



One of the village residents said: *"We lived in a war-like atmosphere, similar to Gaza or even worse. Every day, we would sleep and wake up to the sound of gunfire. Even those who no longer had food in their homes would leave their families even without getting out for bread. We were being bombed by planes and shells, and the teachers couldn't even make it to the school due to road closures and checkpoints. The children were scared to go out, and we, the adults, were afraid as well. We didn't leave the village until it became absolutely necessary for us to evacuate. Around the end of 2017, two schools, Naga' Sheibana Preparatory and Primary Schools, were bombed. Even after the bombing, some families didn't leave despite the harsh living conditions. It was as if they wanted us to leave. No one could bear the educational gap that our children were facing, and who would want their kids to remain uneducated? Whenever we asked where we could send our children to study, they would tell us to take them to schools outside the war zones for exams, and the school would then provide a certificate stating that the student took the exam there. But how could we travel with our children to let them take exams when we hadn't left the village? Where would we go with them, and what would they be tested on when they weren't attending school?"*

Following the stabilization of the security situation and in light of the government's slowdown in reconstruction efforts, the residents of Naga' Sheibana village were forced to rebuild the school themselves, without any contributions from the Egyptian government, either through financial support or participation in the construction process. They received assistance from some local charitable organizations with the aim of providing a suitable environment for their children following the return of the village's inhabitants after years of displacement. The school was opened in October 2022 after a construction process that took more than a month, according to interviews conducted by the foundation with a



member of the school staff and a woman whose two children attended the primary and preparatory school.

*"We were blessed with some donors, and we collected money from each other, 1000 Egyptian pounds each, and we started laying the building block. The donors were from within the village, and there were charitable organizations like the Charitable Society for Community Development in Al-Goura that helped with roofing the buildings, which cost 400,000 pounds. The Village residents contributed the entire amount, and the association only contributed 70,000 pounds. We started working on it on August 13, 2022, and the school was supposed to open in October 2022. It took about 40 days in total... The building block was there, but the part above the foundation had collapsed... We removed the bricks and started building on the old foundation. Initially, the plan was to build 6 primary school classrooms, but thanks to the donors, we decided to continue and add the preparatory school. Al-Goura Association helped us with the roof, doors, and windows, and we built the school in about 40 days."*

- Testimony of a school staff member about the process of building an alternative school in Naga' Sheibana village through the efforts of the village's residents.

## **Al Wefaq Joint Primary School and Al Wefaq Joint Preparatory School**

Recurrent shelling by the armed forces led to the destruction of both Al Wefaq Joint Primary School and Al Wefaq Joint Preparatory School, according to eyewitnesses from the village who spoke to the foundation and to news reports.<sup>60</sup> Through the analysis of

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<sup>60</sup> The Egyptian army transforms turquoise land into a ghost town, Al Jazeera, March 6, 2018: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2018/3/6/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9>





open-source satellite images available on Google Earth Pro, it appears that Al Wefaq Joint Primary School was likely destroyed between 2017 and 2018, while the Preparatory School was probably destroyed in 2020. However, schooling had already been interrupted at both schools due to forced displacement months before these events.

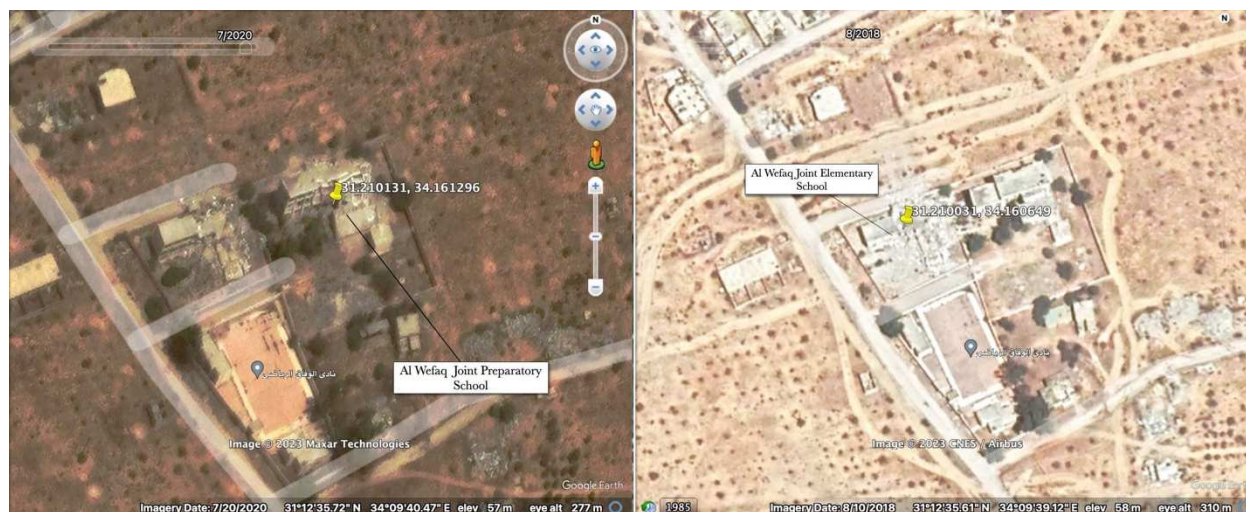


Image 6: the building of al Wefaq Primary School (Right Side) and al Wefaq Preparatory School (Left side) after destruction.

The Sinai Foundation reviewed an open-source video recorded by a local resident in 2022 showing the wreckage of the two schools.<sup>61</sup> As well as another exclusive video obtained by the foundation through a field visit in 2023 to the site of the two schools, showing the extent of the destruction of the two schools, which were almost completely transformed into rubble. The foundation was able to verify the geographical location of the buildings featured in the video by using a distinctive tree within the primary school as well as the western wall of the stricken school.

<sup>61</sup> A post on the "Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah electricity news page" on Facebook shows the wreckage of the two schools, publication date September 5, 2022, access date August 13, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=4002229263335824>



Image 7: The primary school sign is clearly visible amid the rubble in the video clip.

More footage from the video of the Preparatory School shows the almost complete destruction, which makes it unfit to work as a school. The Sinai foundation was able to determine the geographical location of the ruins of the preparatory school through one remaining structure and two trees inside and outside the school.

## Al-Mahdeya Joint Preparatory School

Al-Mahdeya Joint Preparatory School is located in the border village of Al-Mahdeya, south of Rafah. The village became a battleground early in the conflict, significantly disrupting the regularity of education since 2014, with several interruptions due to armed conflicts.<sup>62</sup> Al-Mahdeya Joint Preparatory School suffered complete destruction due to attacks by the

<sup>62</sup> Mona Al-zamlout, the security situation hinders studies in North Sinai, September 26, 2014: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2014/9/26/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84>



armed forces on the school building.<sup>63</sup> According to a local resident who had two children attending village schools, in July 2015, the army converted the village's primary school into a military outpost because it was the highest building in the village. To prevent members of ISIS from using the Preparatory School, which was the second-highest point in the village, for launching attacks on the army, the army conducted two aerial bombings of the building, once in March and again in August 2015, according to the children's parent. After the bombings, all students left the school, and the school administration informed them that they had all passed and were promoted to the next grade, despite not having taken the second-semester exams of the academic year. It was decided to transfer the schooling to another school in the village of Al-Tayra, in Rafah, in the following academic year.<sup>64</sup>

*"The village witnessed numerous conflicts; militants would launch attacks from within the village on army positions, and the army responded indiscriminately, causing significant harm to the residents. A random missile even hit our home, but thankfully, no one died... Education wasn't regular in 2013 and 2014 due to the war, and then schooling ceased entirely in 2015 after the army bombed the preparatory school in the village, rendering the building unsuitable for education. The school was first bombed in March 2015, and I remember a second time in August 2015. The students abandoned the school, and the school administration informed them that all the students had passed and can begin the next grade of their education, even though my children had already taken their first-semester exams. We were directly evacuated from the village by the army at July 2015, probably".*

— Excerpt from the testimony of the parent of two students at the school.

<sup>63</sup> In pictures.. "Mahdia" is a village abandoned by most of its people and those who remain live in a tragedy, Rassd news website, November 22, 2015: <https://rassd.com/166233.htm>

<sup>64</sup> Al-Mahdeya Preparatory School, announcement via the school's Facebook account, October 13, 2015: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02o5dAKhoQeDze3U6odG5KncAoxqc9KPs2CgM2N5CQQSGy1bpTC8DbpKzZicCnAKbEl&id=660758877380124](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02o5dAKhoQeDze3U6odG5KncAoxqc9KPs2CgM2N5CQQSGy1bpTC8DbpKzZicCnAKbEl&id=660758877380124)





Image 8: Satellite images show a match with exclusive images obtained by the foundation from the field.

A chronological analysis of satellite images shows that the school was completely demolished between August 2018 and July 2019.



Image 9: on the right is an image of the school before demolition in August 2018. On the left is an image of the school after demolition in July 2019.

The latest satellite images dated May 12, 2022 indicate an improvement in the area around the school. There have been developments in the school's north-west military position about a kilometer and a half away, as well as the dredging of soil from a number of surrounding farms and the presence of several modern sandy roads in isolated locations.



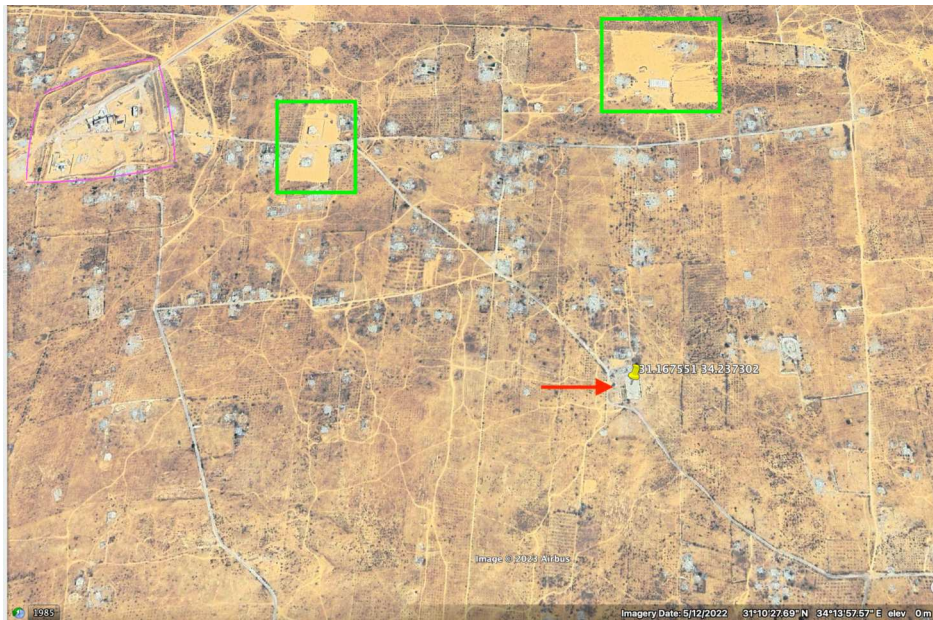


Image 10: The red arrow refers to the position of the school while the green squares refer to the dredged land. The objective and use of dredging is unclear. The violet color refers to the sand fortifications surrounding the camp.

## B) Sheikh Zuweid

The city of Sheikh Zuweid and its surrounding villages became the scene of military operations early in the armed conflict, directly impacting the right to education. Attacks against education became a recurring pattern of systematic violations throughout the years of the war. Early reports in September 13, 2013, documented the Egyptian army's bombing of the preparatory school that was built through personal efforts in the village of Al-Lufayat, south of Sheikh Zuweid. This led to its destruction and student dropout.<sup>65</sup>

Following an attack by armed groups on October 24, 2014, in the area of Karam Al-Qawadees, south of Sheikh Zuweid, which led to the death of over 26 military personnel and the injury of 29 others, the army established a series of military outposts south of Sheikh Zuweid in an attempt to disrupt logistical support routes passing from central Sinai Peninsula to its north through Sheikh Zuweid. Simultaneously, the organization launched

<sup>65</sup> Ismail Alexandrani, "Al-Akhbar" toured the Sinai villages and saw the destruction and victims of indiscriminate operations, Al-Akhbar Lebanese Newspaper, September 18, 2013: <https://al-akhbar.com/Arab/57631>



a coordinated attack on several military outposts with the aim of taking full control of Sheikh Zuweid in July 2015, but it ultimately failed.<sup>66</sup> On February 9, 2018, the Egyptian army announced the launch of the comprehensive operation "Sinai 2018."<sup>67</sup> The aim of the comprehensive operation was to establish permanent security in the traditional strongholds of ISIS in southern Sheikh Zuweid by creating a series of fortified military outposts. For the first time, the army deployed 88 battalions to Sinai, totaling 42,630 fighters, in addition to police forces.

Numerous media reports documented the suffering of students and teachers during the years of the war. Students from Sheikh Zuweid had to walk for kilometers to reach resilient schools or classrooms in private homes after their schools were demolished. This occurred in an atmosphere filled with armed conflicts, interrupted communication and electricity services, and the prevention of teachers from reaching schools due to the detention of their buses at military outposts.<sup>68</sup>

For example, the army demolished Al ma'aniah Joint Primary School, likely without urgent necessity, according to testimonies of local residents interviewed by the foundation. One eyewitness stated that he and other residents in the Al ma'aniah neighborhood tried to convince the field military commander not to demolish the school after he informed them of the army's intention to demolish it, claiming that armed elements frequented it as a hiding place. The residents argued that this was not the case, but the officer insisted on demolishing the school, which was indeed demolished using military equipment during the "Sinai 2018" operation. The school remained closed until the Egyptian authorities rebuilt a new building five years later, reopening the school in 2023, while students during these years irregularly attended classes in a local villager's home.

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<sup>66</sup> Assault in sheikh Zuweid: A turning point in Egypt's fight against terrorism. TIMEP. (2015, June 2). Retrieved July 31, 2022, from <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/assault-in-sheikh-zuwaid-a-turning-point-in-egypts-fight-against-terrorism/>

<sup>67</sup> Statement No. 1 on the comprehensive operation of the Sinai armed forces 2018, the official page of the military spokesman of the Egyptian army, February 9, 2018: <https://fb.watch/dvGagYU17r/?fs=e&s=cI>

<sup>68</sup> Muhammad Hussein, The students of Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah are in the crossfire, arming themselves with knowledge... defying the war on terrorism in their areas and attending their studies... and walking tens of kilometers to reach steadfast schools and classrooms in homes and corners, Al-Youm Al-Sabea, December 15, 2015: <https://shorturl.at/bwCYO>



As events escalated, targeting and undermining education infrastructure remained a viable option. This prompted the member of the Egyptian Parliament for North Sinai and the representative of the pro-Government party Homat Al-Watan on Facebook a photo from an official letter sent to the Minister of Education in 2021, demanding that additional classes be built urgently, noting that the war on terror has destroyed 50 of the 72 schools in Sheikh Zuweid City.<sup>69</sup> He also referred to the same information in a session of the Egyptian Parliament, and posted a video via his official Facebook page.<sup>70</sup>

During the reporting period, the foundation documented the Egyptian armed forces' destruction of 23 schools in the elementary education phase, in Sheikh Zuweid city and its surrounding villages.

The following examples are five case studies of schools in Sheikh Zuweid, which, through compelling evidence, reveal that the military destroyed many of these schools without legitimate targeting or logical justification.

## **Mostafa Hafez Joint Primary School**

According to open-source satellite images available through Google Earth Pro, Mostafa Hafez Joint Primary School and the surrounding areas were systematically demolished starting from 2016. This aligns with the testimonies of local residents whom the foundation met, stating that in 2016, the school was repeatedly shelled by artillery fire from one of the army outposts near the school, resulting in damage to the building. Images from 2020 depict the majority of the buildings, including the school, as completely destroyed. Based on low-resolution Sentinel-2 images, it is likely that the school was entirely demolished in late 2019.

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<sup>69</sup> See an official request from a member of Parliament addressed to the minister of education, the official page of MP Ibrahim Abu Shaira on Facebook, May 25, 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3994002037315710>

<sup>70</sup> Speech by MP Ibrahim Abu Shaira in the Egyptian parliament regarding education in North Sinai, official page of MP Ibrahim Abu Shaira on Facebook, November 1, 2021: <https://www.facebook.com/Abushaera.Ibrahim/videos/1069314940563575>



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



The Sinai Foundation obtained this exclusive footage in April 2023 which shows the school site completely destroyed with no plans looming to rebuild it until the time the report was published.



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)

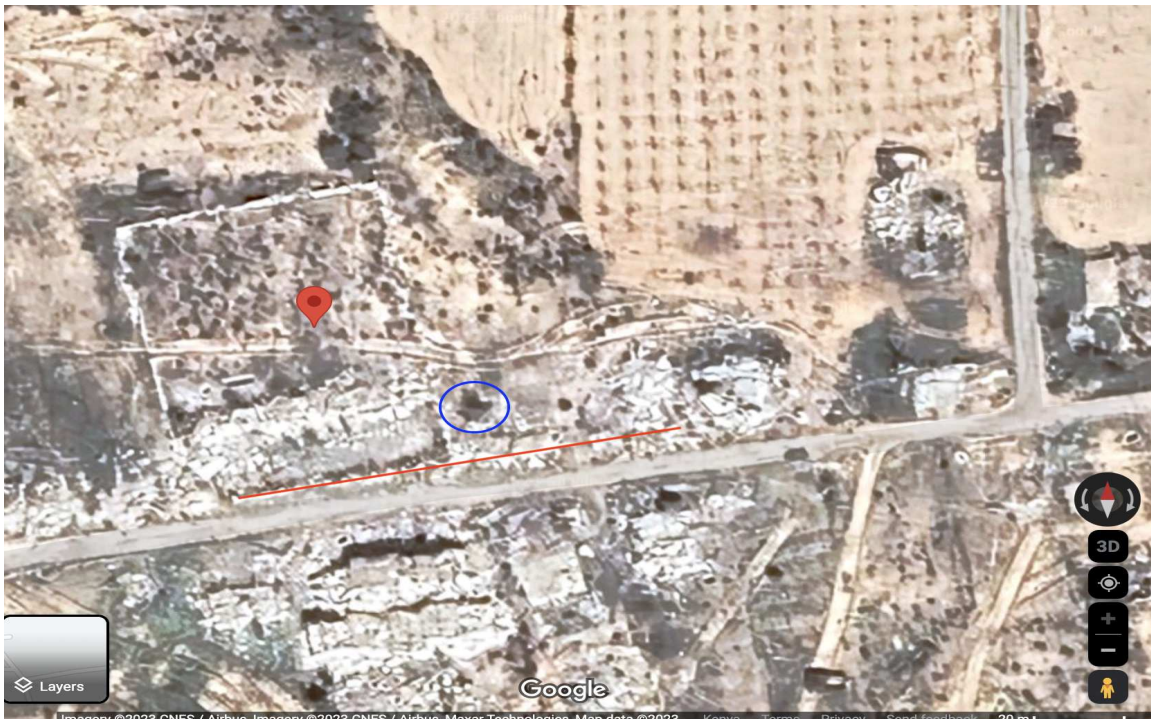


Image 11: Exclusive images from April 2023 match low-resolution Sentinel-2 images that show the school is still in ruins.

The foundation was also able to obtain additional evidence clarifying the school's condition, as a government document related to the falling buildings Committee issued by the governor of North Sinai dated February 2022 shows the committee's description that the building of Mostafa Hafez primary school, code 3400416, "the building is completely destroyed, the rubble spread on the ground".



مدرسة منصف حافظ ابتدائية  
الشيخ زويد  
رقم (4) تابع نموذج رقم (4)  
الحالة الإنسانية للعقار من واقع المعاينة الظاهرية  
رقم (4) 2016

النظام الإنشائي	هيكلية	حوائط حاملة	أخرى	توصيفا
الجلتص	العيوب	نوع العيب	توصيفا	توصيفا
الأساسات	يوجد / لا يوجد	الكسرات	ترخيم	تدهور
الأمعدة		الكميرات	الاصحاح	انصباج
الكميرات		البيلاطات	الاصحاح	هسوط
البيلاطات		السلالم	الاصحاح	أخرى
السلالم		الحوائط	الاصحاح	الاصحاح
الحوائط			الاصحاح	الاصحاح

توصيف الحالة الإنسانية ومدى خطورتها: ...  
قرار اللجنة: ...  
للمحافظة على الأرواح والأموال يقتضى إخلاء: ...

يتقصد: السيد المحافظ  
يعتمد: رئيس الجهة الإدارية  
توقيع أعضاء اللجنة: ...

## Al Touma Joint Primary School

According to eyewitnesses, Al Touma Joint Primary School is one of the schools in Sheikh Zuweid that was subjected to aerial drone attacks and repeated artillery shelling by the armed forces in 2015, leading to partial destruction of the school and civilian homes, resulting in casualties due to indiscriminate shelling. Media reports documented the aerial bombing of Al Touma School in October 2015. Open-source satellite images clearly indicate that the school was targeted between May and November 2015.

Local Facebook pages also reported that the military had used the school for military purposes, placing equipment on the school's rooftop and constructing military structures in





August 2019.<sup>71</sup> This was corroborated by eyewitnesses interviewed by the foundation and is evident in satellite images.

The Committee for Facilities Susceptible to Collapse inspected Al Touma School building on April 16, 2022, and determined that the building was cracked and needed to be demolished. However, as of the time of this report, the building has not been reconstructed.<sup>72</sup>

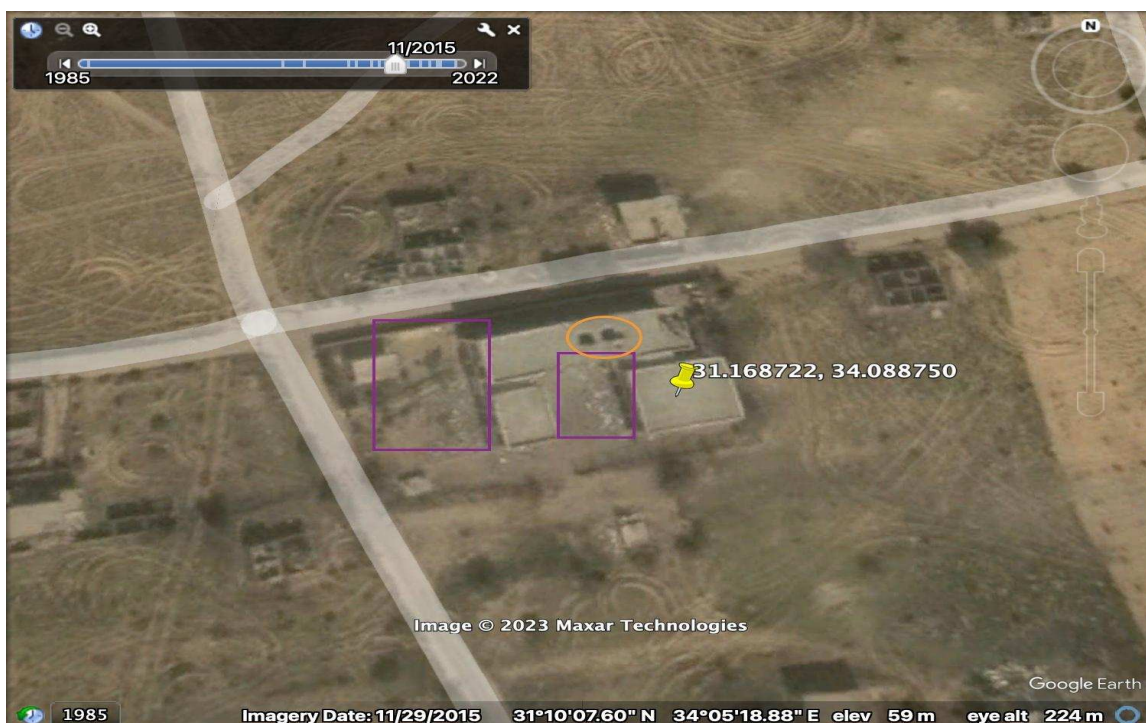


Image 12: Satellite image showing the effects of vehicle tires on the school's perimeter and the debris inside the school from 29 November 2015.

The Sinai Human Rights Foundation was able to obtain several videos taken by the foundation's team in 2023, showing the school partially destroyed and also showing sand

<sup>71</sup> The army turns the school of the village of Al-Touma, south of Sheikh Zuweid, into a military ambush, Sinai news page on Facebook, August 22, 2019:  
<https://www.facebook.com/anbaasinaa/posts/pfbid02LMMrSuPrnhbtWgok42oW9AWj2od5oS5PikkSvMsdZi9gzZoMPbywjkMQHNLEp3YTI>

<sup>72</sup> Mohammed Hussein, removal and new construction of 9 schools within the Sheikh Zuweid Center in North Sinai, April 16, 2022:  
<https://www.youm7.com/story/2022/4/16/%D8%A5%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%809-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%89/5729102>



fortifications in its surroundings and military fortifications on and inside the school's roof. The foundation was able to locate the school's geographical location through the apparent western building, inspection slot and surrounding trees.



Image 13: A snapshot from an exclusive video showing the extent of the destruction and the military fortifications above and inside the school.

Another video taken by the foundation's team during a second field visit in 2023 shows what looks like one of the antennas set up over the school building that is likely to be used by the army in communication operations.



Image 14: A pinned image from a video showing what looks like an antenna that is most likely used for communications.

Satellite images also show a military presence inside the school shown in the image taken on 15 March 2020. It shows modifications in the school's surroundings as well as the



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



presence of some machinery within it. These mechanisms appeared more clearly in another photograph on January 10, 2022.





## Karam Al-Qawadees Joint Primary School

The school is located in the Karam Al-Qawadees area south of the village of AL Kharubah, which is part of the city of Sheikh Zuweid. At the beginning of 2014, following the outbreak of conflict, the Egyptian army established a military post approximately 30 meters away from the school. This military post came under a suicide attack<sup>73</sup> on October 24, 2014, resulting in the deaths of over 26 soldiers and the injury of 29 others.

Following the attack, Hassan Hegazy, the Director of the Directorate of Education in North Sinai Governorate, stated that Karam Al-Qawadees School, which is 30 meters away from the incident site where dozens of soldiers were killed just days ago, was stable and functioning regularly.<sup>74</sup> However, a contradictory account obtained by the foundation through interviews with a teacher at the school and a local resident indicates that the school was completely closed. Students and teachers were transferred to the nearby Al-Kewaza School immediately after the attack and never returned to it, the army later destroyed it in mid-2015. Eyewitnesses also mentioned that the school was not reconstructed as of the time of publishing this report.

In confirmation of the eyewitness account, the Committee for Facilities Susceptible to Collapse inspected the ruins of the Karam Al-Qawadees school building on April 16, 2022 and decided that the building should be removed and rebuilt.<sup>75</sup> While an exclusive video taken by the foundation team on a field visit to the school in 2023, as well as medium-quality satellite images in June 2022, shows that the school had not been rebuilt at the time of publication of the report.

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<sup>73</sup> 29 Egyptian soldiers killed in two attacks, one of them a suicide bomber, in Sinai, BBC, October 24, 2014:

[https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/10/141024\\_egypt\\_sinai\\_blast](https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/10/141024_egypt_sinai_blast)

<sup>74</sup> Education: stabilization of studies in "North Sinai" and the establishment of a fence for "karm Al-Qawadees", Sinai Media Center, October 29, 2014:

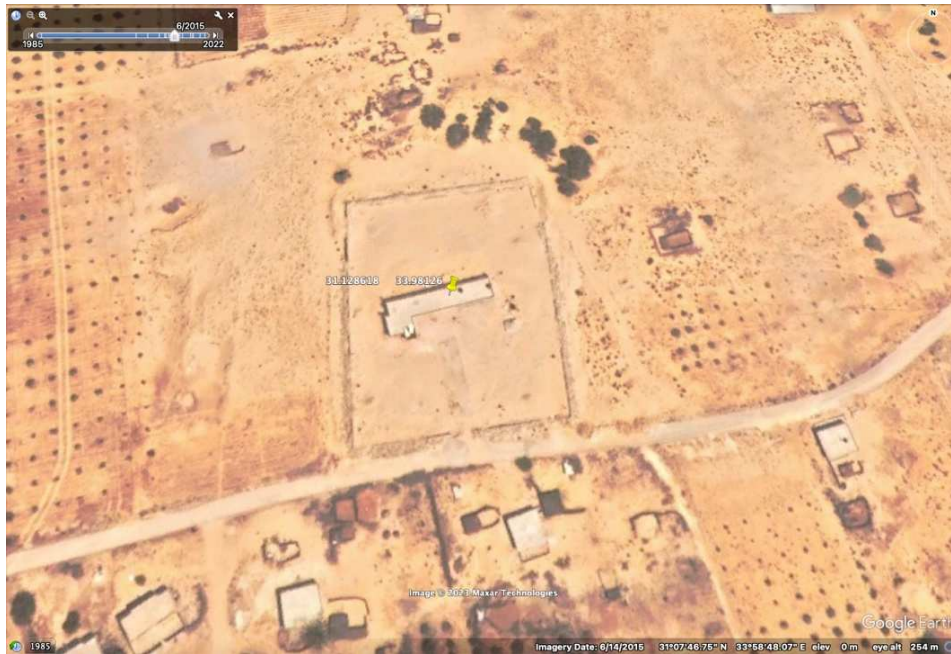
<https://www.facebook.com/sinaimedia/photos/a.180923985376273/542931229175545/>

<sup>75</sup> Mohammed Hussein, removal and new construction of 9 schools within the Sheikh Zuweid Center in North Sinai, April 16, 2022: <https://www.youm7.com/story/2022/4/16/%D8%A5%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D9%80-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%89/5729102>

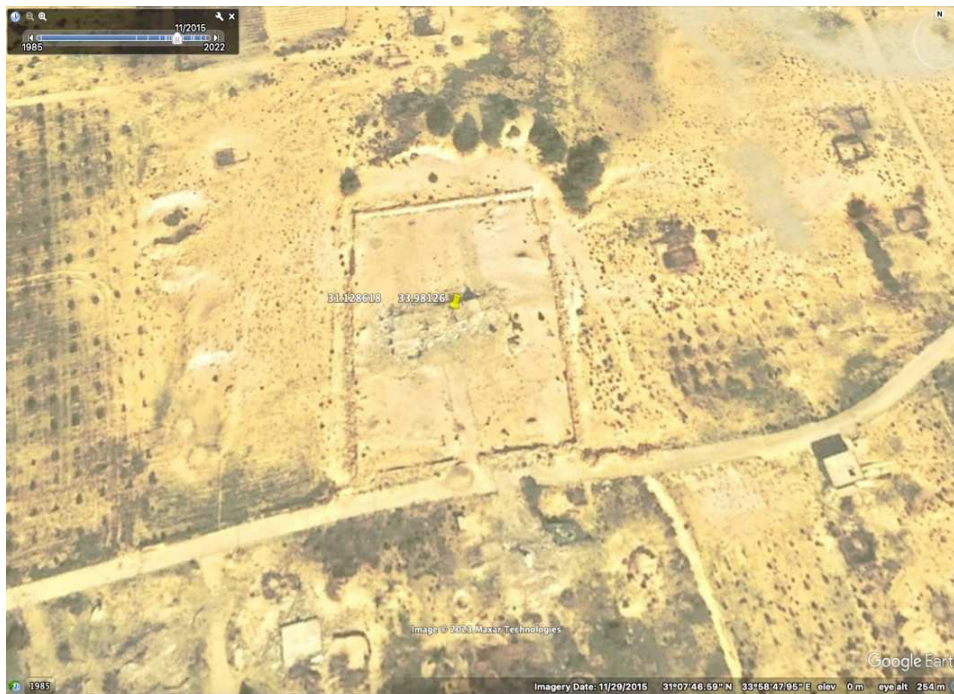




Examination of open-source satellite images using Google Earth Pro shows that the school was completely destroyed between June and November 2015.



**Image 15: Satellite shows the school building in June 2015.**



**Image 16: The school is shown destroyed in late November 2015.**



In a video taken by the foundation's team in 2023 during a field visit to the area, the school is shown to be completely devastated.



Image 17: A still shot of a video shows the remnants of the school after the bombing.

## **Al Shatea' Primary School and Al-Salam Preparatory School**

Both schools are located in the village of Al-Sakadra near the coast of the city of Sheikh Zuweid. These two schools were subjected to destruction by the military forces from July to October 2020 without any apparent urgent necessity. This information is in accordance with two testimonies obtained by the foundation from a local resident and a teacher who worked at the primary school before its demolition. The residents of the village have been subjected to displacement many times in 2018 due to deteriorating security conditions, leading to the closure of both schools to students. Similar measures were taken with other government services.

In April/May 2020, the army compelled the remaining villagers to leave.<sup>76</sup> The army resorted to a policy of forced displacement following repeated attacks by the Sinai Province

<sup>76</sup> 120 Egyptian families displaced from Al-sakadra village without compensation, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 08 April 2021: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/120-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%91%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA>





group against military personnel and vehicles.<sup>77</sup> The foundation had previously documented in periodic reports an intensified military campaign that included military bulldozers, tanks, and explosive experts detonating civilian homes in the village of Al-Sakadra in August 2020.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the destruction of both the primary and preparatory schools was documented in September 2020, and as of the time of publishing this report, they have not been reconstructed.<sup>79</sup>

*One of the village residents said, "The army told the locals that the extremists receive food and supplies from people among you. To impose a blockade on them, it was necessary to evacuate all civilians in Al-Sakadra and close the Sheikh Zuweid coast, and that's what happened. Al-Sakadra turned into a military zone, and the entire coastal area from Sheikh Zuweid to Rafah was closed off. The residents were completely displaced from the area. I was studying in high school at Abu Tawila School, but my younger brothers were attending Al-Salam Preparatory School and Al-Shatea' Primary School in Al-Sakadra until 2018 when the government closed the schools there, and they transferred the students to Al-Karasheen School. My brothers continued in Al-Karasheen School until we left, and no one remained in the area. After we left, on approximately September 3, 2020, the army demolished the two schools in the village, Al-Salam Preparatory School and Al-Shatwa' Primary School. It is illogical that the army, in order to eliminate terrorism in a village with at most ten or twenty militants, would demolish two schools and a health unit and blow up every house in the village, house by house. Imagine that the army entered the village*

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<sup>77</sup> Killing of 4 recruits from the Border Guard forces at a military checkpoint in the sakadra area of Sheikh Zuweid, North Sinai, Al Jazeera, May 20, 2020:

[https://twitter.com/AJA\\_Egypt/status/1263204596689842177?s=20](https://twitter.com/AJA_Egypt/status/1263204596689842177?s=20)

<sup>78</sup> The most notable violations that occurred in August in Sinai, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, October 8, 2020:

<https://sinaifhr.org//show/19>

<sup>79</sup> Killing of 4 recruits from the Border Guard forces at a military checkpoint in the sakadra area of Sheikh Zuweid, North Sinai, Al Jazeera, May 20, 2020: [https://twitter.com/AJA\\_Egypt/status/1263204596689842177?s=20](https://twitter.com/AJA_Egypt/status/1263204596689842177?s=20)



*with bulldozers, tanks, and Hummer vehicles, blowing up houses east of the water desalination station in the village and the village's mosque. During this campaign, when the militants fired a few shots at the campaign, the army withdrew and then bombarded the area by air a few days later. After that, the campaign returned to demolish the houses until the village was completely wiped out.*

Comparing satellite image between May 2019 and July 2020 shows traces of devastation after a potential attack that completely wiped out the building west of the school, along with the two schools that are still damaged.



Image 18: Satellite images of the two schools' buildings compared between May 2019 (on the left) and July 2020 (on the right).

In recent footage obtained exclusively by the Sinai Foundation from local sources on February 21, 2023, the almost complete destruction of Al-Shatea' Joint Primary School, as well as Al-Salam Joint Preparatory School, appears.





Image 19: Geolocation of “Al Shatea” school was determined by comparing an installed shot from a video showing the school and a satellite shot.

The installed shot from the exclusive video clip illustrates what remains of the school after demolition, displaying clear signs of battle damage on the destroyed parts of both schools. The analysis by the foundation aligns with the testimonies of local residents who spoke to the foundation, confirming that the army demolished the school in 2020, along with most of the houses in the village, where the majority of its inhabitants had already been displaced in 2018 due to the intensification of armed conflict in the area.

Multiple video clips obtained by the foundation from open sources show armed elements affiliated with tribal groups loyal to Sinai Tribes Union Army still frequenting what remains of the school, as seen in the case of the video clip below. The video was removed from the TikTok social media platform, but the foundation retains a copy of it in its archives.



Image 20: An installed image from a video showing a member of one of the armed tribal groups loyal to the army inside Al-Shatea' Primary School.

One of the teachers at Al Shatea' Primary School said:

*The educational process was going normally until the time when militants appeared in our village. Families have been displaced from the village since the beginning of 2016 due to the security situation. Studies at Al- Shatea' School and Al-Salam School were interrupted in 2018 during the army's operation, which was called Comprehensive Operation. Al-Shatea' School consisted of a single floor with 6 classrooms containing about 200 students, and there were between 30 and 35 students in each classroom. After the closure of the school in 2018 the students and staff were attached to the karacheen school. In 2020, the army destroyed the school, and not only demolished it, but destroyed the entire village with tanks and dynamite, including the two schools, the health unit and all the houses.*





## C) Al-Arish

The city of Al-Arish is considered the administrative capital of the North Sinai governorate, and includes the main headquarters of the security and military services in Sinai. Since the beginning of the armed conflict, the Sinai province group has worked to turn the city of Al-Arish into a flashpoint, and until mid-2019, it was able to carry out sudden and effective attacks on the positions of the security forces on the outskirts of the city of Al-Arish or plant explosive devices in the main axes inside the city in the path of the movements of government forces. But the organization was unable to find a foothold inside the city, as groups affiliated with the organization were active in agricultural areas south and east of the city of Al-Arish.

The attack of the Sinai province group, which targeted the plane of the ministers of Defense and interior while it was inside Al-Arish airport on December 17, 2017, represented a turning point in the course of events in the region.<sup>80</sup> Following that attack, on January 19, 2018, President Sisi announced a plan to forcibly evict residents and demolish all farms and houses within a five-kilometer radius around Al-Arish airport to create a security buffer zone.<sup>81</sup> In 2018, the Egyptian Armed Forces launched an extensive military campaign called Comprehensive Operation - Sinai 2018, accompanied by forced displacement, house demolitions and bulldozing of civilian farms. Human Rights Watch documented this military campaign in a detailed report, which reveals, through the analysis of satellite images, that the army demolished about 5,500 buildings in and around the city of Al-Arish, most of which in 2018. These demolitions affected schools in the vicinity of the city of Al-Arish.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Islamic State claims responsibility for Al-Arish airport attack in Egypt, Reuters, December 20, 2017:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/is-sinai-attack-mn5-idARAKBN1EE1PC>

<sup>81</sup> Al-Sisi reveals details of targeting the plane of the ministers of Defense and interior at Al-Arish airport (video), Al-Masry Al-Youm, January 19, 2018: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1247529>

<sup>82</sup> Extensive demolitions by the Egyptian army in North Sinai, Human Rights Watch, March 17, 2021: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2edf37c189c746a4b6912ddfcbcb76d>



The Sinai Foundation documented the destruction by army forces of 5 schools in the city of Al-Arish, relatively densely populated, as well as being a non-remote or border urban area. Among these schools are 4 schools in the elementary education levels and one school for secondary education.

The following examples are a case study of two schools in Al-Arish, which reveals through irrefutable evidence that the army destroyed these schools without the legitimacy of targeting or logical justification.

### **Al-Shoraifat school for Elementary Education**

The school is located in Al-Shoraifat community of the village of Al-Towail, east of the city of Al-Arish. Satellite images show the destruction of Al-Shoraifat school for elementary education, which occurred as a result of the armed forces carrying out a clearing campaign in the area, which witnessed the destruction of the school and the demolition of civilian homes between February and August 2018. This coincided with the military forcibly displacing the villagers at the same time, according to two testimonies obtained by the foundation.<sup>83</sup>

One of the teachers at the school said in an interview that she was surprised by the destruction of the school when she went to the school headquarters. The school administration has written a report on this and informed the competent authorities. After that, the Directorate of Education issued a decision to enroll the students of the school at Al-Towail school for elementary education, but the students were only attending to take tests and were unable to attend the study seats at the alternative school due to the displacement of parents to distant areas.

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<sup>83</sup> A military campaign is taking place in the village of Al-Sharifat, east of the city of Al-Arish, including two bulldozers, "Shahid Sinai" page on Twitter, April 27, 2018" <https://twitter.com/ShahidSinai/status/989778803290406912?s=20>



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade(2013 - 2023)

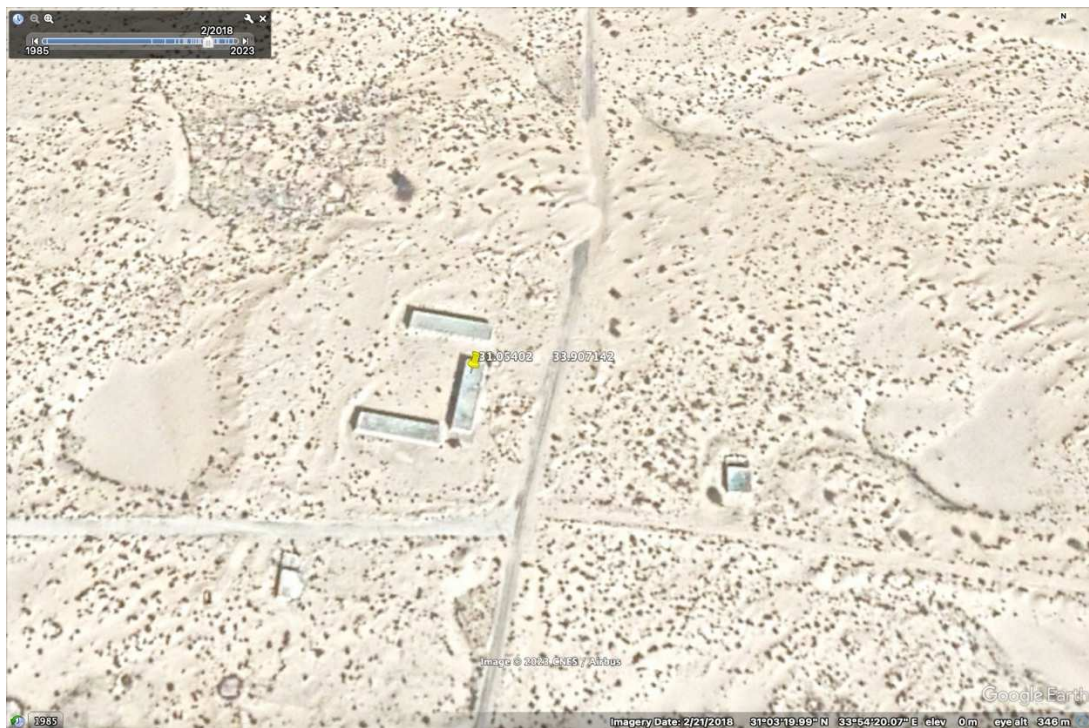


Image 21: satellite images of a school before the destruction.

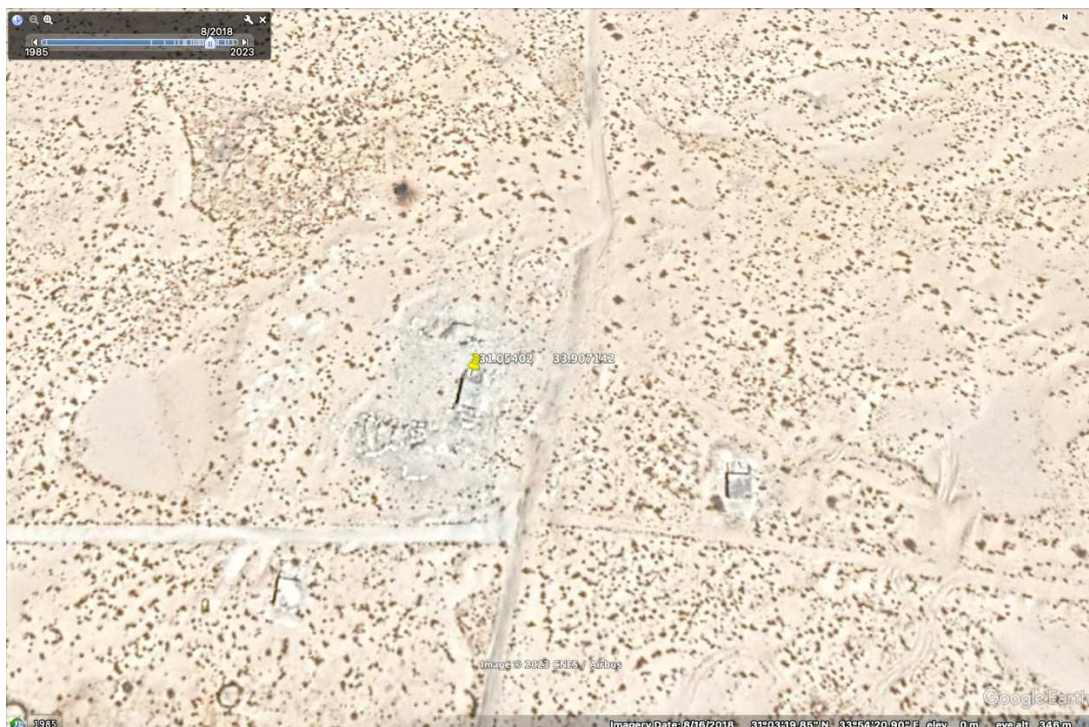


Image 22: satellite images of a school after the destruction.

The footage below, taken exclusively by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights during a field visit in 2022, shows the effects of the shelling of the school by army forces. The





foundation also obtained another video clip taken in 2023 showing children playing on the ruins of the school after some families returned to the village of Al-Sharifat east of Al-Arish in early 2023.



Image 23: an installed screenshot from a video showing the ruins of the school after it was shelled by army forces.



Image 24: geolocation of the ruins of the school.



## Al-Marashda School for Elementary Education

The school is located in the "AL-Marashda/ Abu Sukar" area east of Al-Arish, and was opened in 2013. Residents of the area were displaced due to military operations in the period between 2014 and 2015 to avoid the effects of the armed conflict, so classes at the school were stopped, according to two residents of the area.

In 2019, according to open-source satellite images available on Google Earth Pro, the military destroyed the school between April and June 2019, implementing a presidential decision.

A local resident told the foundation that the decision to demolish the school came in implementation of a decision of the president of the Republic issued in the wake of the attack that targeted the plane of the ministers of Defense and interior while inside Al-Arish airport on December 17, 2017. President Al-Sisi announced on January 19, 2018 a plan to forcibly evacuate residents and demolish all farms and houses around Al-Arish airport to create a security buffer zone, which resulted in the school falling within the boundaries of the security buffer zone.<sup>84</sup>

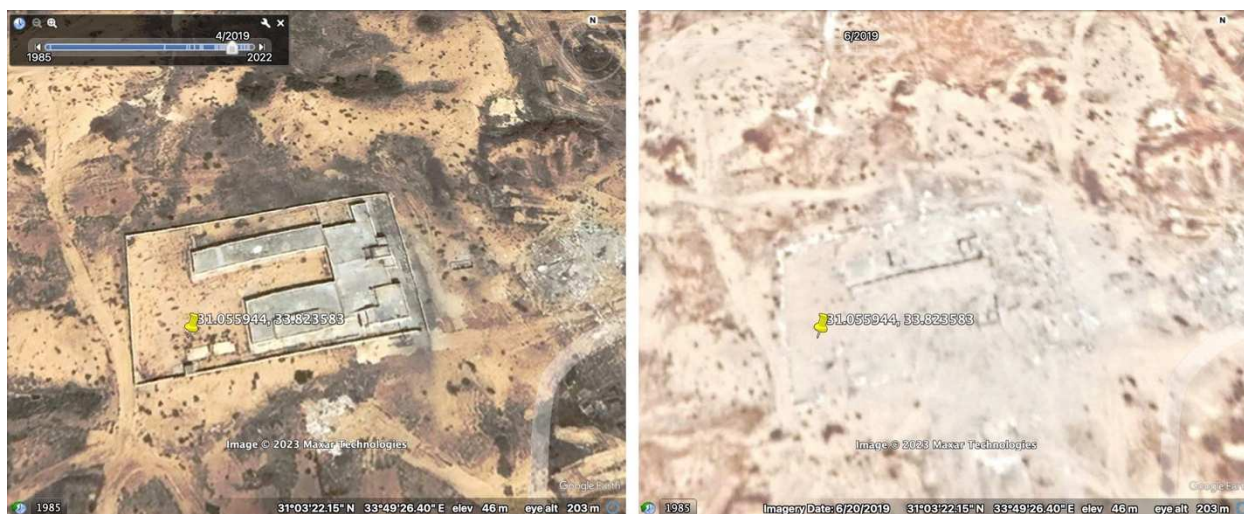


Image 25: satellite images of the school in April 2019 before the attack (Left side), and the school in June 2019 after it was destroyed (Right side).

<sup>84</sup> Al-Sisi reveals details of targeting the plane of the ministers of Defense and interior at Al-Arish airport (video), Al-Masry Al-Youm, January 19, 2018:

<https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1247529>





## D) Bir Al-Abd

The organization tried to open a new front west of the Sinai in the villages of Bir Al-Abd in mid-2017, after the situation in its traditional strongholds east of the Sinai became difficult as a result of the tightening pressure on it, the displacement or exodus of tens of thousands of residents from East Sinai to its West, and severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods. The organization was forced to expand westward to the vicinity of Bir Al-Abd to ease the burden on its groups in eastern Sinai.<sup>85</sup>

Since mid-2019, the city of Bir Al-Abd has joined the list of areas that are increasingly witnessing attacks and fighting between the Egyptian Armed Forces and the Sinai province group, after the cities of Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and Al Arish were the center of military operations. The events reached their peak in Bir Al-Abd when the organization attacked an army camp in the village of Rabea, located west of the city of Bir Al-Abd, on July 21, 2020, after that attack, the Sinai province organization was able to impose control over several villages southwest of Bir Al-Abd. Following the Rabea attack and the control of the organization over the villages, the local residents were forced to flee their homes to other areas that were safer, and they did not return to them until after the organization's elements withdrew from them after about 70 days, as the army allowed the people to return to their villages under its supervision without completely removing the explosive devices and explosive objects that the organization most likely planted before its withdrawal, which led to the death of 16 civilians and the injury of 18 others as a result of these explosive devices during the period between July 26 and November 18, 2020.

Since mid-2019, the city of Bir Al-Abd has joined the list of areas that are increasingly witnessing attacks and fighting between the Egyptian Armed Forces and the Sinai province group, after the cities of Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and Al-Arish were the center of military operations. The events reached their peak in Bir Al-Abd when the group attacked an army

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<sup>85</sup> "Imminent" end of ISIS in Sinai and a mysterious future the "lesser of two evils" strategy does not maintain stability or rights in the long run, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, September 26, 2022: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/155>





camp in the village of Rabea<sup>86</sup>, located west of the city of Bir Al-Abd, on July 21, 2020. After that attack, the Sinai province group was able to impose control over several villages southwest of Bir Al-Abd.<sup>87</sup> Following the Rabea attack and the control of the group over the villages, the local residents were forced to flee their homes to other areas that were safer, and they did not return to them until after the group's elements withdrew from them after about 70 days, as the army allowed<sup>88</sup> the people to return to their villages under its supervision without completely removing the explosive devices and explosive objects that the group most likely planted before its withdrawal, which led to the death of 16 civilians and the injury of 18 others as a result of these explosive devices during the period between July 26 and November 18, 2020.<sup>89</sup>

These events caused the emergence of systematic violations of the right to education to a lesser extent than in the cities of East Sinai, but the repetition of these patterns is highly likely to reflect systematic behavior practiced by government forces in the armed conflict in different time periods and geographical areas. The Sinai Foundation documented the attack of the Egyptian Armed Forces on one school in the city of Bir Al Abed, Iqteya Joint Primary School located southwest of the city of Bir Al-Abed, which led to its partial destruction.

The following example is a case study of Iqteya Joint Primary School that was attacked by an aerial bombardment. Since the residents returned in October 2020 and for 3 years, the primary school remained closed while its students studied at the village's preparatory school. Later in 2022, the local authorities removed the attacked wing inside the school

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<sup>86</sup> Details of the attack on the "Rabea" base in Bir Al Abd, Mada Masr, July 22, 2020: <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2020/07/22/news/u/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A6/>

<sup>87</sup> "ISIS" is heading west: Bir Al-Abd villages talk about displacement, Al-Manassa, August 23, 2020: <https://almanassa.com/stories/4581>

<sup>88</sup> For detailed testimonies on the subject, read the human rights bulletin for the month of October issued by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/35>

<sup>89</sup> "Bir Al-Abd" villages: ISIS bombs and the negligence of the Egyptian authorities are causing new civilian casualties, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, October 24, 2020: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/27>



and built a new premises on the school campus. The school operated back in September 2023, according to interviews with local residents.

### **Iqteya Joint Primary School**

According to an interview conducted by the foundation with an eyewitness, an Egyptian army airstrike most likely targeted the Iqteya Joint Primary School in July 2020, the effects of which can be seen via satellite images below. Footage taken in 2022, obtained by Sinai foundation from local sources, also shows the damage caused by the bombing on the roof of the school building. Two more videos, taken exclusively by the foundation during a field visit to the village at the end of 2020, confirm that the shelling caused a hole in the roof of the building and other parts of the school. The digital Investigations Laboratory of the foundation was able to determine the geographical location of the school via open-source satellite images guided by the location of the corresponding Preparatory School.

During the years 2022/2023 the Egyptian government removed the attacked wing inside the school and built a new building, but the school was not operate back until September 2023.



Image 26: An exclusive image of Iqteya Primary School



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)

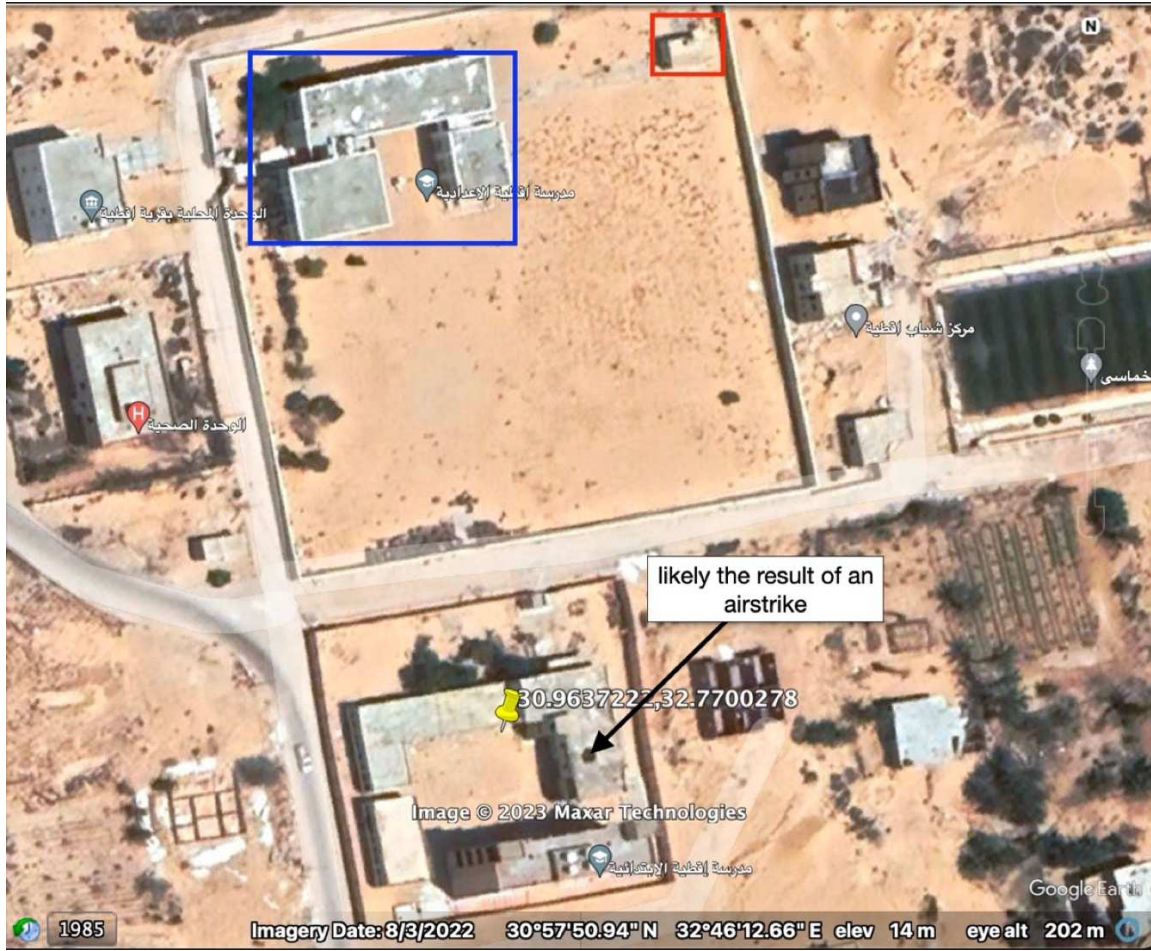


Image 27: satellite images show the hole in the roof of the school caused by the bombing.



image 28: an installed shot from a video clip shows a hole caused by aerial bombardment of the roof of the school building.





One eyewitness said: *“When the group took control of the village in July 2020, people feared for their lives and left the place. During the first days of ISIS control over the place, some residents returned to take things from their homes, because when we left the village, we left or fled from it somehow. We were collectively shocked by ISIS, which had spread in the village. On the second day, my neighbor and I decided to go back to pick up things from our homes, while there were clearly flying planes and buzzers in the air. When we arrived at the village, ISIS members refused to let us in. That's when we started convincing them that we would only take some clothes and medicines that we had left at home, so they let us in for only 15 minutes. A few minutes after we entered, the aircraft began bombing, and the bombing was in areas not far from my house, and with every strike the ground was shaking violently. We wanted to get out of the house after the deadline set by ISIS for us had expired but we were afraid of shelling. My friend told me that if we don't get out now, ISIS members will think that we are the ones who reported their locations and they will kill us. We waited until the aircrafts left and got out. When we came out, and it was a little before sunset time, we found that the house of my relative "Hamza Ibrahim Salman" had been hit by a rocket, and it was completely destroyed, while the primary school next to it was targeted and smoke was coming out of it. Thank God that we did not meet one of ISIS members during our exit. God saved us from death that day. When we returned to Iqteya on October 10, 2020 after the withdrawal of ISIS, we found that the school building was unsafe and vulnerable to falling due to aerial bombardment, so primary school students moved to study at the preparatory school. Also, primary students started studying in the morning, while preparatory school students in the evening, and this situation has continued until September 2023.*



## E) Al-Hassana

The city of Al-Hassana is one of the least densely populated cities of the Sinai Peninsula, despite its vast sprawling area, extending from the international border with Israel in the east to the Suez Canal in the West. It is also 87 kilometers away from the city of Al-Arish. The location of Al-Hassana and its harsh geographical terrain have given it military importance to both sides of the conflict, as the camps and checkpoints of the Third Field Army are spread in different areas of the city to control the organization's supply lines and smuggling corridors. The border villages in the city of Al-Hassana witnessed forced displacement campaigns against local residents and the demolition of their villages following operations carried out by the Sinai Province group against Egyptian army positions. The military operations have immensely affected the right of children to education, as the patterns of violations we observed in other cities were repeated.

During the period covered by the report, the foundation documented the destruction by the armed forces of 6 schools in the city of Al-Hassana and its villages, all of them at the elementary education level.

The following examples are case studies of three schools in Al-Hassana, which reveal through irrefutable evidence that the army destroyed many schools without any legitimacy or logical justification for targeting.

### **Arab Belli Primary School and Arab Belli Preparatory School**

The foundation documented the destruction of two schools by army forces located in the village of Arab Belli, north of the city of Al-Hassana. The army forces forcibly displaced the residents of the community and then destroyed all civilian homes by booby-trapping and blowing them up almost completely, according to a local resident's testimony.

Sinai Foundation spoke with one of the teachers at the Arab Belli Primary School, who confirmed that the army completely demolished the primary and preparatory schools and all civilian houses in the village in 2021. He said that the story began in 2018 after members



of the Sinai province group stole some tools and computers from the school, and pointed out that the militants began to threaten the residents, warning of cooperation with the army. These threats severely affected the well-being of children as parents prevented them from going to school out of fear for them, especially girls whose education was interrupted at an early age. He added that following this incident, army forces closed the two schools and instructed the residents of the community to leave the place within only two days, and the education department then transferred the students of the two schools to AL-Raysan school, which is 12 kilometers away from their village, in difficult conditions where there is no public transport.

After the Egyptian authorities announced the end of military operations in Sinai, residents of the village posted photos on Facebook documenting an aspect of the visit of the governor of North Sinai to the place on July 8, 2023, and indicated that they received promises from the governor to return the displaced residents to their village and rebuild the destroyed schools as well as the infrastructure of the village.<sup>90</sup>

The official account of the "Presidency of the City of Al-Hassana" on Facebook published news about an inspection visit to the village of Arab Belli on July 9, 2023, carried out by a number of employees in the Presidency of Al-Hasana City Council, to make the necessary inspections to identify the needs of the village of electricity services in preparation for the return of citizens and life to the village, according to the news. One of the images that appeared in this publication shows the wreckage of the Arab Belli Preparatory School.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Part of the visit of the Governor of North Sinai to the Arab Bali community on July 8, 2023, posted on the Facebook account of a resident of the area:

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0DNqWziBj2XeKBSsAtAfCDqHSmBbrx5rjsyenrCfsypEwEBXsqZN46WTsrfZ4oTpJl&id=100004018164307](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0DNqWziBj2XeKBSsAtAfCDqHSmBbrx5rjsyenrCfsypEwEBXsqZN46WTsrfZ4oTpJl&id=100004018164307)

<sup>91</sup> A Facebook post on the official page of the Presidency of the City of Al-Hassana showing a field visit by council employees to the Arab Belli area. One of the images shows the ruins of the Arab Belli Preparatory School, July 9, 2023:

<https://www.facebook.com/AlhssnaCity/posts/pfbid0iVtHorAsndyBZdk5kp8HprVMzgQpdm2uNontJbbUktZntaE74ZjZC8TfqPoSKd29I>



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



Image 29: Satellite image of the two schools in November 2015 shows the two schools and some of the assembly buildings before the destruction.



Image30: A satellite image of the two schools in March 2021 shows the two schools and some of the village buildings after the destruction, the Primary School in the green rectangle, the Preparatory School in the red rectangle.



To determine the geographical location of the two schools, the Foundation obtained an image of the Arab Belli Primary School in 2017 from open sources.<sup>92</sup>

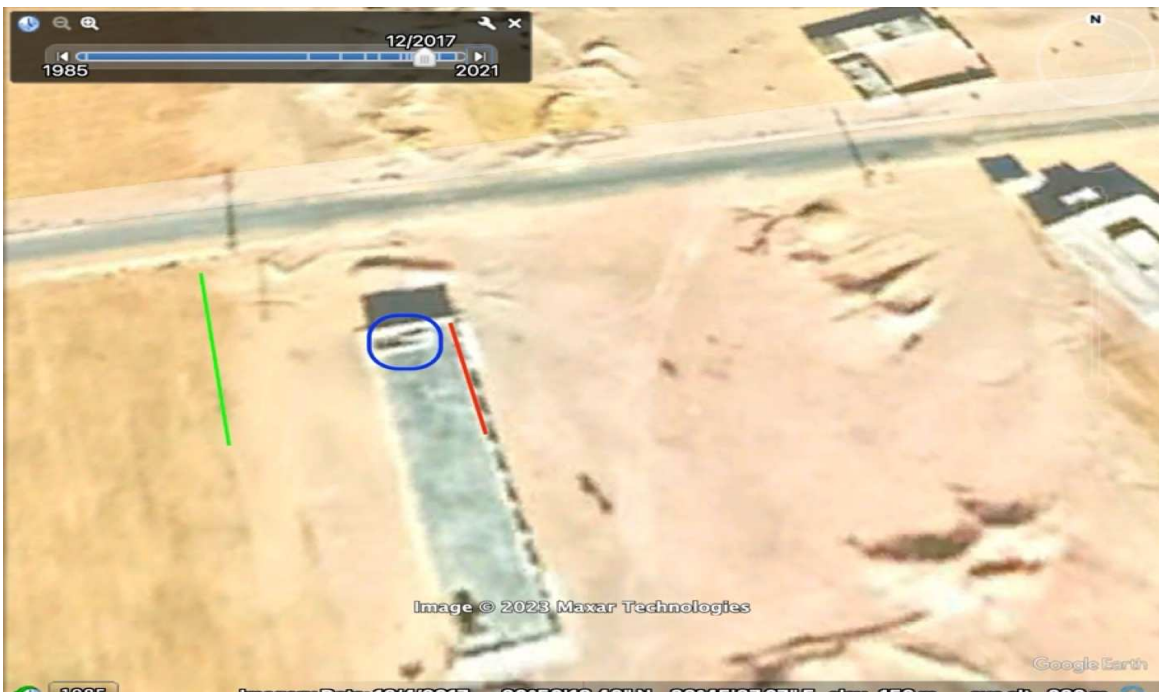


Image 31: Open-source satellite images from March 2021 show the remains of the primary school ruins.

<sup>92</sup> A Facebook post by one of the workers in the education sector posts photos documenting a visit she made to Arab Belli primary and preparatory schools on November 21, 2017, the digital analytics Laboratory at Sinai foundation relied on these photos to determine the geographical location of the school:  
<https://www.facebook.com/hanen.nona.52/posts/pfbid02qviVktHTDQ7YdTL0BhxSo4xmwJypVWKQJGdxM6JB2u148xprTX46w5FRDCLvW73bl>





*"At the end of 2018, the students of the two schools were enrolled to study at Al-Raysan School building, 12 kilometers away... then most of the students of both primary and preparatory schools stopped going to school ... the story began in late 2018 when terrorists entered the school at night and stole tools from the science laboratory and computer devices. The next day when we went to school and found it the way it was, we went to an army camp nearby and reported what had happened. The army told us that they will check what happened and take the necessary measures. I don't know how the news reached the terrorists, but a few days after we informed the battalion about what had happened, we found threatening phrases written on the wall of the Preparatory School warning us not to cooperate with the army. A week after this incident, the army battalion informed the educational administration that the students of the two schools and teachers would be transferred to complete their studies at Al-Raysan School building, about 12 kilometers away. The army also ordered the residents present to evacuate the village in order to comb it and pursue the terrorists. A large number of people had to move to Ismailia governorate to stay away from the war, and some of them moved to Al-Arish. Which means that those who moved to Al-Raysan were teachers and very few students whose parents lived in nearby areas. In Bejaia in 2019, we asked to go to the Arab Belli area to take furniture and student papers from the two Arab Belli schools to send them to Al-Raysan. In fact, the army allowed us to do so and protected us during our entry. On the way there, the army had set three ambushes on the side road leading to the school, which is about 12 kilometers long. After a while, I heard that the army demolished the two schools, as well as all the houses in the village."*

- Testimony of a member of the school's educational staff.





## Wadi Lussan Primary School

The school is located in the border area of Wadi Lussan, and it is about 6 kilometers away from the border with Israel, and it 67 kilometers away from its affiliated city, Al-Hassana. The region witnessed armed clashes between the army and elements of the Sinai province organization, as the security forces in North Sinai revealed the largest explosives store belonging to Bait Al-Maqdis group in one of the cemeteries on a mountain called Umm Hasira near the Wadi Lussan area, according to the Sada el-Balad news site.<sup>93</sup> Sources also told Al-Bawaba News that the Third Field Army succeeded in liquidating the organization's second-in-command in the Wadi Lussan area in central Sinai.<sup>94</sup>

The organization also expanded its attacks against civilians, whom the organization describes as collaborating with the army. In light of this, locals of the region were forced to move to other areas under the burden of abuse from both sides of the conflict. As these attacks continued, the army forced the remaining residents of the village and its affiliated communities to leave during 2017.<sup>95</sup> Later, the army demolished civilian houses and set up a military base in the school and its surroundings, which had been partially destroyed as a result of the army's bombardment earlier, according to two testimonies obtained by the foundation from residents of the village.

The satellite image taken on August 21, 2020 shows the presence of most likely two military vehicles, then three military vehicles are most likely shown in another image dated May 2021. The length of the vehicles, which exceeds 6 meters, supports the hypothesis that they are military armor. Satellite images also showed that one building of the school is still standing, although the roof was damaged and the second building belonging to the

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<sup>93</sup> Seizure of 1.6 tons of explosives and 30 boxes of ammunition in a cemetery in Sinai, Sada El-Balad, January 1, 2016: <https://www.elbalad.news/1897811>

<sup>94</sup> Ahmed Shahdi, The liquidation of the second-in-command of the Bait Al-Maqdis organization in central Sinai, Al-Bawaba, March 30, 2016: <https://www.albawabhnews.com/1854972>

<sup>95</sup> A post on Sinai 24 page about the displacement of 44 families from the "Ja'ifah, Valley Of Thieves" areas in central Sinai, publication date March 2, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/news24sinai/posts/pfbid0RZKciSpZFLdgSMvbttaaso1UJH2p1U5cbbGrxY2seZnUcvTLMZMwYh4WgKNbcVDWii>



school was completely demolished, while all the surrounding buildings were completely demolished.

The satellite images did not show the presence of sand fortifications directly surrounding the school, but what turned out to be fortifications appeared on the opposite side of the school, where military armor stands. Images taken in August 2020 and May 2021 indicate the presence of debris adjacent to the school, most likely caused by damage to the roof of the main school building and the demolition of the smaller building attached to the school.



**Image 32:** The image on the right shows the presence of military armored vehicles, and the green markings show the demolition of one of the school buildings. While purple marks indicate sand fortifications. The image on the left shows the school building before demolition.



**Image 33:** The image on the right shows an increase in the number of armored vehicles inside the blue square in 2021, which means that the school is being used as a military base until that time.



## Third: Using Schools and Educational Facilities for Military Purposes

The use of schools by the military and police to support military and security operations, using them as military bases, checkpoints, or supply and sustenance centers, as well as for surveillance and sniper placements on their rooftops, is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. This law prohibits the establishment of military objectives within or even near densely populated areas, including the locations where schools are typically found. Simultaneously, these practices demonstrate that the Egyptian authorities have failed to uphold their legal obligations under international human rights law to respect the right of students in these schools to education, as the schools used for military purposes were often unsuitable for learning throughout their period of use. The foundation has successfully documented the military use of 49 schools in 5 cities in North Sinai, with 10 of these schools still being used for military purposes at the time of publishing this report.

Furthermore, the foundation has recorded instances where the military and police used several schools for military purposes while educational activities continued within the school premises and students were present inside. This included the establishment of military posts, snipers on school rooftops, and the positioning of military vehicles in the vicinity. Examples of such cases include Garada and Qabr Omair schools in Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Arish Advanced Industrial Technical School in Al-Arish, and Mosafaq and Amoria schools in Bir Al-Abd. This section of the report also reveals, through compelling evidence, that the military has been using these schools for military purposes for extended periods without considering the best interests of children or respecting the rules of international law.





## **A) Rafah**

The Sinai Foundation has documented the use of 7 schools in Rafah by military forces to support military efforts throughout the years of armed conflict against the Sinai Province group. Most of these schools were primary education institutions. As of the moment of publishing this report, two of these schools, despite being outside the demilitarized zone, are still being used for military purposes by the army: Al-Ta'awon Primary School and Al-Mahdeya Primary School. Also, the Rafah Secondary Industrial School, within the buffer zone in Rafah, still serves as a military outpost, until the moment of publishing the report.

The following examples represent case studies of three schools in Rafah, revealing through compelling evidence that the military has been using these schools for military purposes for extended periods without considering the best interests of children or respecting the rules of international law.

### **Al-Ta'awon Joint Primary School**

Satellite images taken between 2015 and 2017 show some military fortifications at Al-Ta'awon Joint Primary School, located within the jurisdiction of Naga' Sheibana village in Rafah. These images suggest that the school may have been used by the military during that time, as it appears surrounded by sand fortifications similar to those observed around other schools used for military purposes. This is further corroborated by the testimonies of local residents who spoke to the foundation. They mentioned that the school was closed at the end of 2015 because the military needed it for use as a permanent military post, coinciding with the displacement of local residents. Satellite images between 2017 and 2018 indicate that fortifications were further developed at the school, including the construction of a wireless communication tower inside it, implying that the school has been used as a military base since then, at least until the time of publishing this report.



**Image 34:** A 2016 satellite image showing some military fortifications of the military at the school.

Geospatial analysis of satellite images between 2017-2018 shows that a radio tower and two buildings, are constructions that the foundation has been able to document in most schools that have been used or are being used as military sites in North Sinai by the armed forces.



Image 35: a satellite image of the school in 2018 shows the presence of a radio tower and two buildings as part of the military base established by the army at the school.

An exclusive image obtained by the foundation in 2023 confirms that the army continues to use the school for military purposes, despite the return of residents after years of displacement to areas near the school. The image shows a radio communications tower, military fortifications and observation towers.



Image 36: an exclusive image taken in 2023 shows the new fortifications and buildings created by the Army, as well as the radio tower.





Satellite images taken as recently as December 2022 show that the entire plot of land has been developed into a number of buildings, as well as a semblance of a tower. The fortifications around and above the school grounds indicate that they are complementary to the already existing barrier, and show that the army does not plan to leave soon.



Image 37: a satellite image showing newly built structures that are likely to be used by the army forces as part of the military base, dated 5/12/2022.

## Al-Mahdeya Joint Primary School

Al-Mahdeya Joint Primary School is located in the village of Al-Mahdeya, south of Rafah City. The satellite images below compare the surroundings of the school in 2014 with the changes that occurred in subsequent years, including the bulldozing of agricultural areas, the demolition of civilian homes and the appearance of military construction in the vicinity of the school beginning in 2015.

Eyewitnesses informed the foundation that the school closed its doors to children in September 2014 after it was shelled during armed clashes between the military and the Sinai Province group, that was confirmed by some media reports.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Mona Al-zamlout, the security situation hinders studies in North Sinai, September 26, 2014: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2014/9/26/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84>



The witnesses also confirmed that the military turned the primary school into a military post in July 2015 because it was one of the highest buildings in the village. This was done to prevent members of the Sinai Province group from using the preparatory school building, the second-highest point in the village, to launch attacks on the military.



Image 38: Changes seen in 2015 (left) compared to 2014 (right) as the surrounding cultivated land was bulldozed for military construction.

Significant constructions were witnessed on the school's premises, which were verified through open-source satellite images and recent footage obtained by the foundation in 2022. The forces set up a radio tower between 2017 and 2018, then built another, likely in 2021, according to open-source maps.

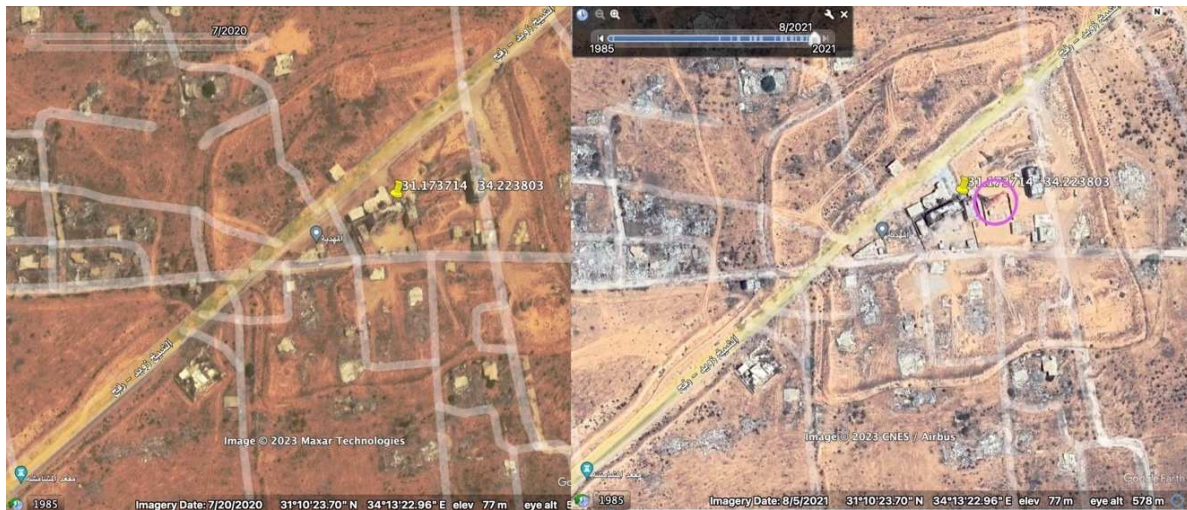


Image 39: On the left, only one wireless tower can be seen while on the right we can see the one that was built later.





Multiple videos from open sources taken at different times of the year 2022 show the extent of the development of the military base established by the army on the territory of Al-Mahdeya school over the years of the war, including the following proven footage from videos posted on social media platforms by armed militias loyal to the army, and show the heavy presence of members of those militias and military vehicles belonging to the army, which can be matched with available satellite images and even other footage taken by local sources of the base from a distance in 2022.<sup>97</sup>



Image 40: The geolocation of the school that was turned into a military outpost as shown in Google Earth images. The panoramic shot shows the presence of the two radio towers built by the army on two different dates.

<sup>97</sup> A video posted by an account named "Abu Moussa" on the Facebook platform on March 26, 2022, showing in front of Al-Mahdeya Primary School. A number of members of tribal groups supporting the army appear in the presence of forces and vehicles belonging to the Egyptian army. Military fortifications are also visible above and in front of the school and a wireless communications tower.

<https://www.facebook.com/100006688530356/posts/pfbid03NPfUpizVd7TYNVns8bZvGy33TKfjwLhJNienbEzMWGaxGdxUYDrfd9Bzdw6yVUI/?mibextid=5zvaxg>









Image 42: An exclusive image obtained by the foundation on March 15, 2023 shows military fortifications on and around the school's roof.

Satellite images confirm the start of work on the establishment of a military barracks near the school between May 2021 and May 2022, and also included work on improving and developing sand barriers surrounding the school.



Image 43: Shows the construction of a military barracks and sand fortifications near the school

The first sand fortifications around the school appeared in May 2017 after a demolition of the buildings surrounding the school took place between October 2016 and May 2017,



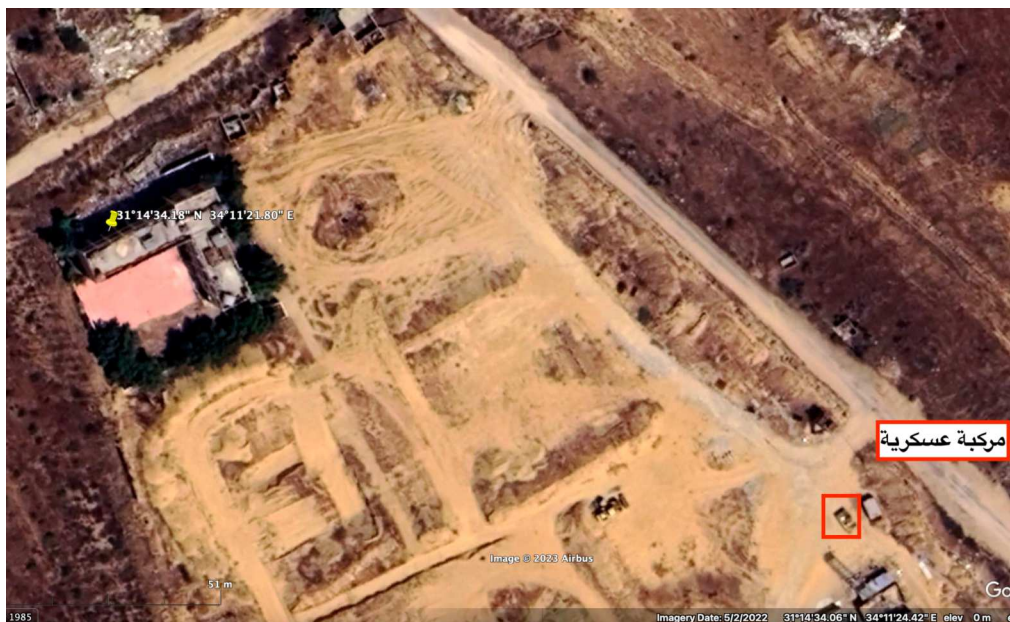


keeping the school building, the buildings used inside the sand fortifications, and a few surrounding buildings that were subsequently demolished before 2019.



Image 44: The image compares October 2016 (on the left) before the demolition of the buildings surrounding the school and fortifying the school with sand fortifications before May 2017 (on the right). The red lines show the position of the sand fortifications.

Three satellite images taken on May 2, 12 and 22, 2022 also showed the presence of military vehicles inside the perimeter of fortifications adjacent to the school. The length of the military vehicles is about 5.5 to 6 meters and the width is about 2.5 to 3 meters. Which corresponds in dimensions to the vehicles of the Egyptian army.





# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)







The latest private satellite images obtained by the foundation on August 10, 2023 show the developments in the construction of the military barracks, as well as the change in the shape of the sand fortifications surrounding the school, indicating the continued military use of the school and its surroundings by the army, until then.



Image 45: The recent image (on the right) shows the continuation of ground paving operations, which indicates the continuation of construction operations.

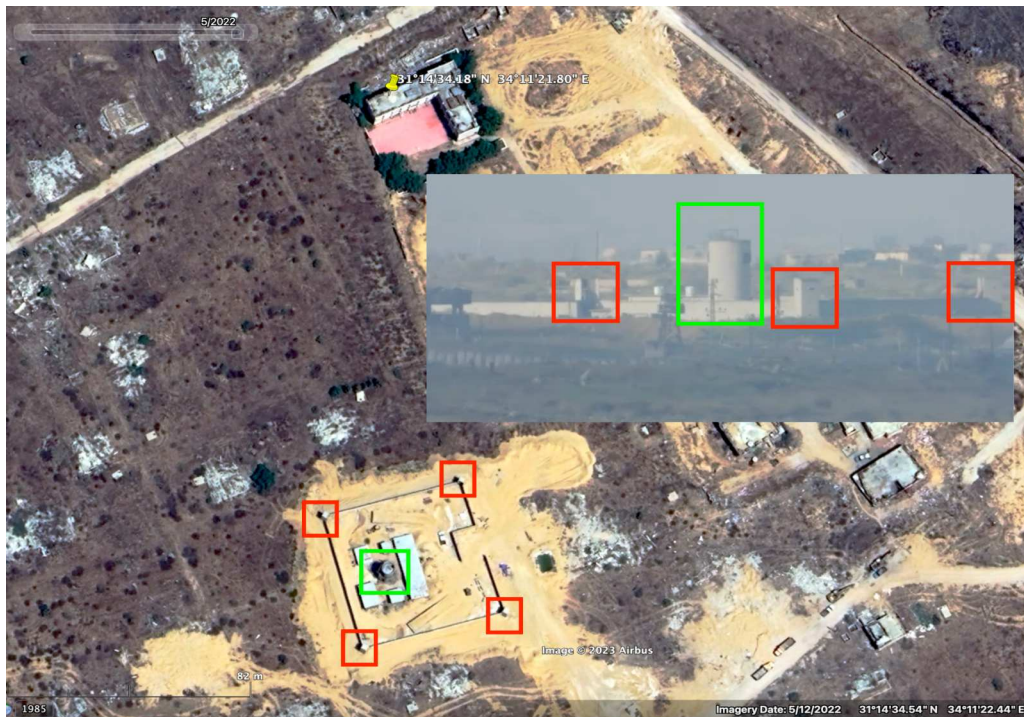


Image 46: The image shows the security towers in red, and in the middle of the barracks is a high tower, most likely an operations control tower.



A village resident, the father of a female student at the school, said:

*"The militants enter the village at night and harass people, the army enters it in the daytime to comb it and look for the militants who withdrew at night, and in the end we, the civilians, remain the ones who pay the price. When the army enters the village, they choose high buildings and places snipers in them. Of course, every time they enter it, they choose the roof of the Qoz Ghanem school to reveal the entire area. In May 2016, the Takfiris booby-trapped the school gate, the fence, and the roof at night and informed some parents that they had booby-trapped the school because the army was climbing over its roof, and told us not to send our children to school. When the teachers saw the gate in the morning, they blocked the entrance of the students and notified the Army, who called in bomb experts and dismantled it. However, the school has since closed its doors and it was taken as an ambush by the army.*

*After that, the army began to tighten its grip on the people, and the ambush remained on the rooftop of the school all night shooting randomly. There are many people who were injured by gunfire, some of whom also died, and many families left the village out of fear. Until October 2016, the officers literally said "whoever I catch here, I will shoot him, I don't want to see anyone here, I am giving you two days to move furniture from your homes". He said that without offering people any alternative. Of course, the families left. I swear to you that I went out in the same clothes immediately with my children, without being able to take anything with us from home. The ambush exists even today, and the school is intact, as people saw it in March 2023, but no one can go there except militants working with the army.*





*My eldest daughter is 17 years old; she is supposed to be in the third stage of secondary school now. She has not been continuing her education since 2016 when she was in her last year of primary school. She has spent 6 years so far at home without continuing her studies. She was an excellent student at the Qoz Ghanem school in Rafah before they displaced us. Due to the financial situation, I was no longer able to get her to continue her education. In the area to which we were displaced, that is, on the outskirts of Ismailia, there is no school near us. We are also a simple family, and although I was a farmer, I care about educating my girls, but I don't know where to take her, the school here is far away."*

## **B) Sheikh Zuweid**

The Sinai Foundation has documented that army and police forces used 19 schools in Sheikh Zuweid to support military and security operations during the years of armed conflict against the Sinai Province group. Among these schools are 15 schools in the elementary education stages, and 3 secondary schools. Three of those schools are still being used by the military for military purposes at the time of publishing this report, according to field visits by the foundation's team and testimonies of local residents.

The following examples are case studies of three schools in Sheikh Zuweid city, revealing through irrefutable evidence that the army used these schools for military purposes for long periods of time without taking into account the best interests of children or respecting the rules of international law. One of these schools was used by the Army as a military point at the same time that students were inside the school for 7 years, which turned the school into a potential military target for ISIS in a way that endangers the lives of children.



## Garada Elementary School

Garada Elementary School is located on the international road from Al-Arish/Rafah in the Green Valley area west of Sheikh Zuweid. The area witnessed armed clashes between the military and ISIS.<sup>99</sup> According to the testimonies of three village residents and media reports, the military converted the school into a military post for seven years.<sup>100</sup> In February 2015, the army established a military post with vehicles in front of the school, military fortifications, and snipers on the school's rooftop to monitor traffic on Al-Arish/Sheikh Zuweid road.<sup>101</sup> However, students continued to study inside the school building while the military forces were stationed there. Some parents refrained from sending their children to school out of fear, as it had become a military target for Sinai Province militants.

Sinai Province group planted explosive devices near the school multiple times to target military vehicles, resulting in casualties and injuries among the soldiers.<sup>102</sup> Witnesses also reported that soldiers would move between the school's classrooms during school hours and would sometimes participate in maintaining discipline and organizing students during the morning assembly. They often fired shots from the school's rooftop, causing panic among the students. The military continued to use the school for military purposes until April 2022. Later, on May 23, 2022, the school underwent maintenance and renovation after the military forces left.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> An Egyptian officer was killed and a number of injured in an armored vehicle explosion in Sinai, Ma'an news agency, November 19, 2019: <https://www.maannews.net/news/1000756.html>

<sup>100</sup> Mona Zamlut, Sinai schools accused of "terrorism", March 30, 2015: <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2015/3/30/%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%80-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8>

<sup>101</sup> Army forces occupy the homes of Sinai residents instead of protecting them, Rassd News Network, March 25, 2015: <https://rassd.news/135357.htm>

<sup>102</sup> 3 recruits were injured after an explosive device exploded in the Garada area east of Al-Arish, masrawi website, May 27, 2016: [https://www.masrawy.com/news/News\\_Regions/details/2016/5/27/852595/%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-3-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B4](https://www.masrawy.com/news/News_Regions/details/2016/5/27/852595/%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-3-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B4)

<sup>103</sup> A post on the personal account of "Mohamed Omar" on Facebook showing photos of the restoration of the school and confirming the exit of the army from it, date of publication May 23, 2022, date of access July 12, 2023:



In the testimony of two students from the school, as reported in a newspaper in 2018, "There is an army post above my school, but I'm not afraid when the officer searches me." This is what Aya, a sixth-grade student, said about her school, while her classmate Huda said, "Soldiers and officers enter the classrooms during classes to investigate with us about the whereabouts of our parents, and they inquire about who is visiting us." Aya continues, perplexed: "I can't answer all the questions, and sometimes I skip going to school because of these questions."<sup>104</sup>

Satellite images between January 25, 2015, and June 14, 2015, show the school surrounded by sand fortifications, coinciding with the appearance of new fortifications on the school's rooftop, likely surveillance towers. This suggests that the school, its surroundings, and the opposite road were probably transformed into a military barracks. The alignment of the main road was also altered, with additional curves and barriers added to the road to slow down cars.



Image 47: The green lines show the sand fortifications surrounding the school and the opposite side of it. The red squares indicate military vehicles, while the arrows and black circles indicate the new bends that have been added to the road to slow down the speed of cars.

[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid02CLzJKC3y1NX3z28oUk69xW5GjRFZZRnwDuE2NMfSQia2MkDkQAT6xqNeHy3usNfel&id=100011398003120](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02CLzJKC3y1NX3z28oUk69xW5GjRFZZRnwDuE2NMfSQia2MkDkQAT6xqNeHy3usNfel&id=100011398003120)

<sup>104</sup> "Above my school is an ambush"!.. Army and militants clash over educational buildings in Sinai, Arabic Post, February 9, 2018:

<https://arabicpost.net/archive/2018/02/09/%D9%81%D9%88%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%83%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86/>



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade(2013 - 2023)



Image 48: The black squares indicate the modern watchtowers built on top of the school's roof. The picture on the right is dated July 7, 2018, and the picture on the left is old before the construction of the towers on June 26, 2014.

According to available satellite images, the school continued to be used for military purposes at least until May 2021, while eyewitnesses confirm that army troops were still inside and on the roof of the school at this time and until April 2022. The subsequent image dated June 2022 shows the straightening of the road again, the disappearance of the armor located on the opposite side and the removal of sand fortifications.

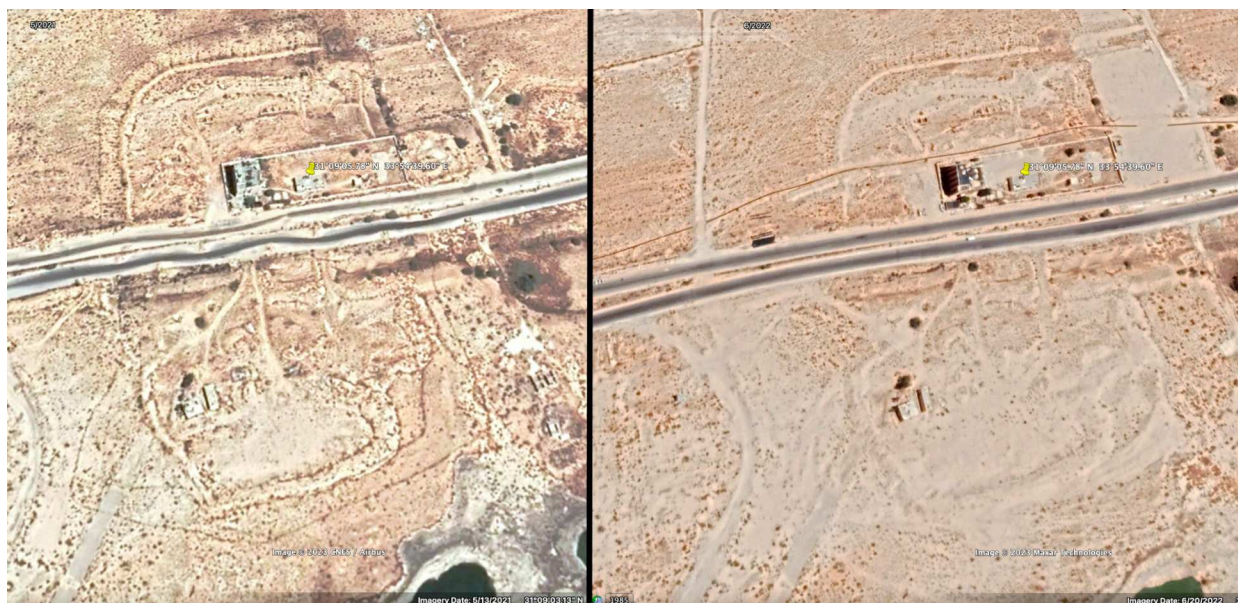


Image 49: The recent image on the right shows the withdrawal of military equipment and the removal of sand fortifications compared to the previous image in 2021 on the left.



A video obtained by the foundation in early 2023 shows the removal of the towers above the school compared to the presence of fortifications in front of and above the school in a previous image from open sources 2015, which is confirmed by satellite images since 2022.



Image 50: A comparison of pictures of the school before and after the removal of the military base with recent satellite images in 2022, confirming the withdrawal of army forces from it.

## Al-Okour Joint Preparatory School

Al-Okour Preparatory School is located in the village of Al-Okour, southwest of Sheikh Zuweid city. According to interviews with a teacher at the school and a local resident, the military began using the school as a military post on November 7, 2016, and continued to do so for 7 years until the army evacuated it on August 10, 2023. During these years, the preparatory school students were relocated to Al-Okour Elementary School in the village.<sup>105</sup>

Examination of open-source satellite images of the school indicates that it was first used as a military post between October 2016 and May 2017. This is corroborated by a [news report](#) from El-Watan, a newspaper close to the Egyptian government, citing a security source:

<sup>105</sup> A post on Twitter for the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights account about the evacuation of the army withdrawal forces from Al-Okour Preparatory School, date of publication August 10, 2023, date of access September 15, 2023: <https://twitter.com/home>





"The army managed to establish a large security ambush inside the 'abandoned' Al-Okour School south of Sheikh Zuweid to prevent terrorist elements from using it as a shelter again." However, eyewitnesses' accounts confirmed that the school was operating regularly until the military prevented students and teachers from entering it to establish a military post on the school's rooftop.<sup>106</sup> They added that the army informed the school administration of the necessity of setting up the ambush to protect the residents, as Sinai Province militants were positioned near the school building. As a result, the school's educational activities were relocated to the primary school in the village.

The foundation digital investigations laboratory identified multiple modifications and recent construction around the school, especially to the east and south of the school. The rooftop of one of the residential buildings located southeast of the school was reinforced with military structures that cannot be clearly seen in high-resolution satellite images but are clearly visible in the exclusive videos obtained by the foundation.

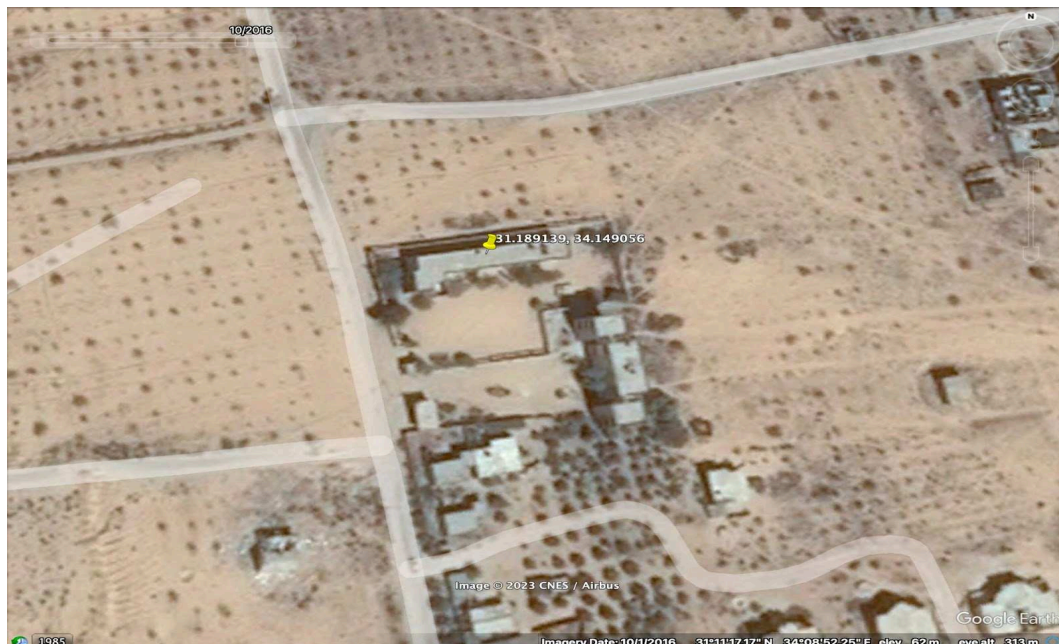


Image 51: Photo of the school's 2016 satellite before the start of its military use.

<sup>106</sup> Muhammad Muqallad, Establishment of 3 new security ambushes south of Sheikh Zuweid, El-Watan newspaper, November 8, 2016: <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/1571997>



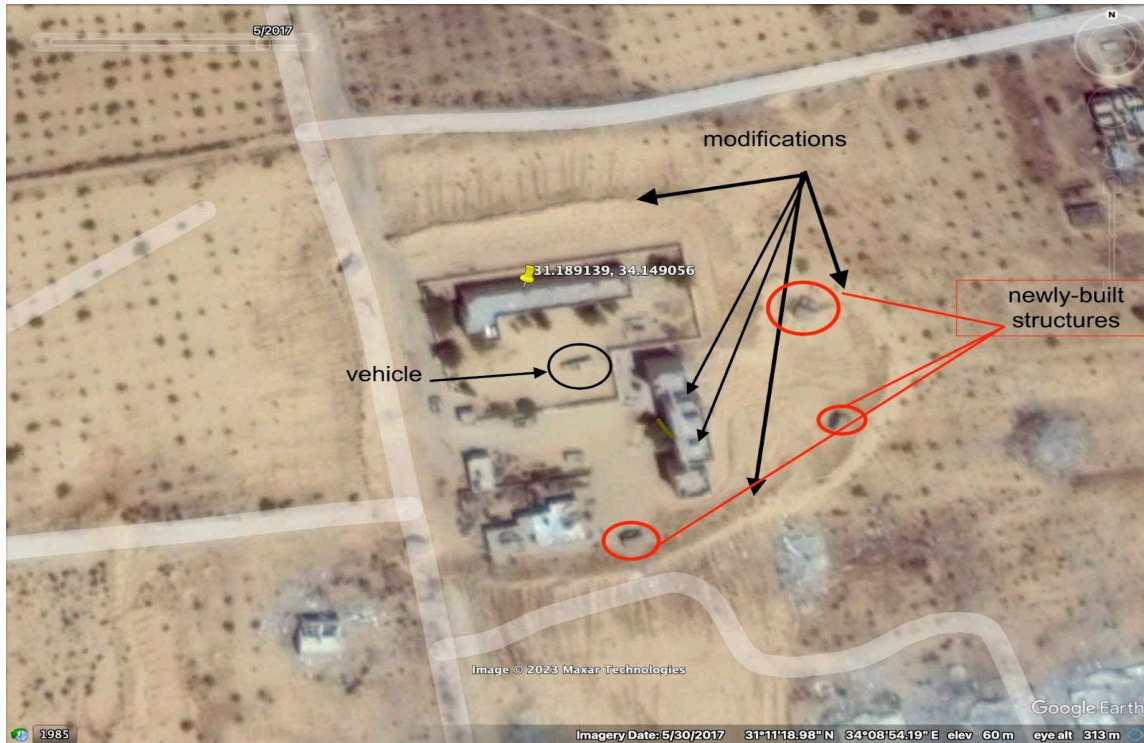


Image 52: Satellites show the school in use as a military fulcrum.

Not only was the school used as a military base, but the army forces, mostly in 2017, also demolished the two-story buildings south and east of the school. The buildings had previously been used as residential houses and were adjacent to a small piece of green space that had been bulldozed, a move often carried out by army forces with the aim of bulldozing land from vegetation that could obstruct visibility and reconnaissance.

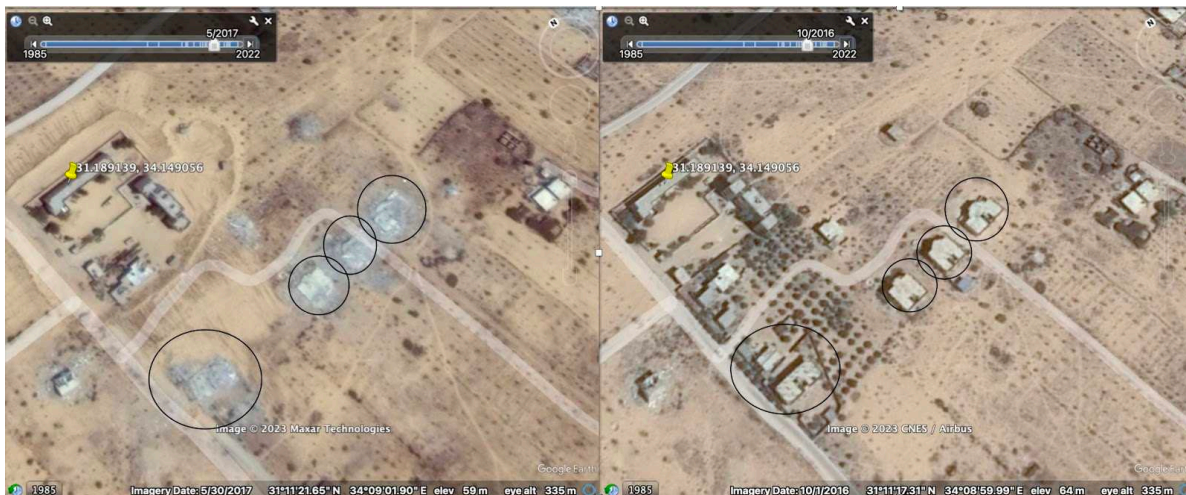


Image 53: Satellite images showing the demolition of four two-story buildings (right), likely to give the army a better control and surveillance point.





Satellite images by Google Earth Pro dated July 5, 2019 show a military vehicle, most likely an Egyptian army tank, north of the school.



Image 54: satellite image showing at least one military vehicle outside the school.

An exclusive video obtained by the foundation in 2022 confirms the use of the school in support of military operations of the army forces, where vehicles and men from a pro-army militia can be seen talking about "killing rats," as one of them said, referring to ISIS.



Image 55: a panoramic image formed from an exclusive video obtained by the foundation and showing the match with satellite images.



*"Education at the school was stopped on November 8, 2016 and the reason was the establishment of an ambush at the top of the school from the army. The first semester of the academic year starts in September and ends in January, the school closed its doors in the middle of the study. The educational administration informed the school principal that the army says that the militants are using places close to the school, which poses a danger to students, and the Army decided to station itself on the roof of the school to protect us, and because the school building is considered relatively high. They also decided to move us to a nearby primary school, and indeed that's what happened, then they set an ambush on the roof of the preparatory school. When we moved to the primary school, the situation also did not remain the same as in April 2017, when the school was bombed, but thank God it was empty of students. The school building was slightly damaged due to the bombing, and it was not restored at that time, so we returned with the students to the building even though there were cracks in it due to the shells falling on it. Students were studying in the intact classrooms and we were trying to keep them away from the destroyed walls, fearing that parts of them would fall. This situation continued until the renovation of the primary school in 2022. As for the preparatory school, there is still an ambush, and it will need restoration after the removal of the ambush.*

- An interview with a teacher in 2022 before the army evacuated the school building.

## **Al Sekka Al Hadid Elementary School for Boys**

The school is located in the middle of a residential neighborhood in the center of Sheikh Zuweid city. According to the testimonies of two residents of the city, the police used the school in support of security operations for 4 years and 9 months, starting from March 1, 2018 until the departure of the troops on December 30, 2022. This is reinforced by an open-





source video posted on December 30, 2022, viewed by the Sinai foundation for Human Rights, and kept a copy of it, showing the removal of fortifications in front of the school, which was established by the Egyptian police earlier.<sup>107</sup>

The foundation obtained an official document clearly proving that the school turned into a security anchor and closed its doors to children for years. The document shows an official letter issued by the Office of the undersecretary of the Ministry of Education in North Sinai to Parliamentarian Ibrahim Abu Shaira dated November 13, 2021, revealing that Al Sekka Al Hadid Elementary School for Boys, is being used militarily by 14 soldiers from the Egyptian police. The document explains the inability of the educational administration to renovate the school building due to its continued military use during 2021.



محافظة شمال سيناء  
مديرية التربية والتعليم  
مكتب وكيل الوزارة



**الاستاذ الفاضل النائب المحترم / ابراهيم ابو شعيرة**      **عضو مجلس النواب**

**تحية اعراس وتقدير**

بشأن الاقتراحين برغبة المتقدمين من السيد النائب المحترم / ابراهيم ابو شعيرة

**القول :-** بشأن رفع كفاءة مبنى مدرسة السكة الحديد للتعليم الاساسي بمدينة الشيخ زويد - محافظة شمال سيناء

- تتشرف بعرض الاتي
- مدرسة السكة الحديد بنين وبياناتها كالتالي

عدد الفصول والقراعات	جناح ( ١ )	جناح ( ٢ )	عدد الطلاب
١٧ فصل + ٧ فراغ تكلمي + ٢ إدارة	( ٥ ) ادوار	دورين	٦٦٥

- المدرسة مغلقة أمنيا لوجود كمين امني ( داخلية ) عددهم تقريبا ( ١٤ ) فرد
- تم نقل الطلاب والحاقهم على مدرسة السكة الحديد بنات فترة مسائية

**لماذا**

يتعذر في الوقت الراهن اتمام عملية رفع الكفاءة نظرا لوجود قوات أمن داخل المدرسة واعلى مبنى رقم ( ١ ) وفورا اخلاء المبنى سيتم عملية رفع الكفاءة على الفور .

**الخاتمة :-** بشأن رفع كفاءة مبنى الادارة التعليمية بالشيخ زويد

- تتشرف بعرض الاتي :- كود مبنى الادارة ٢٤٩٩٩٦٤
- بدأ بالفعل أعمال الصيانة لمبنى الادارة التعليمية في الشيخ زويد
- المبنى مكون من خمسة ادوار
- تكلفت الصيانة الاجمالية ١.٦٥١.٥٦٦.٨٠٠ جنيه

مرسل لسيادتكم للعلم والاحاطة والتوجيه بما يلزم  
وتفضلوا بقبول فائق التحية والاحترام




الكتب: 068 3322752      Tel: 068 3322749      EMAIL: nsinai@moe.gov.eg

<sup>107</sup> A post published by the "Al-Saqr Al-Sinawi" account, a resident of Sheikh Zuweid, on Facebook, documenting with a video the moment the military fortifications were removed in front of the school. Publication date: December 30, 2022. Access date: September 17, 2023:

[https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0rhVMG5sJihzUeqN5LCS1TMJZ7Rbetb8h3adCve54fxj4p8M9pmQJ6UKAHfMV5g7cl&id=100010140215472&paipv=0&eav=AfbfzN0eCXTQP0gtN-Ne-YsRibtNyFhGooABWQ0bKvbV-KNI93Bi5vfU81hzXdl03g4&\\_rd\\_](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0rhVMG5sJihzUeqN5LCS1TMJZ7Rbetb8h3adCve54fxj4p8M9pmQJ6UKAHfMV5g7cl&id=100010140215472&paipv=0&eav=AfbfzN0eCXTQP0gtN-Ne-YsRibtNyFhGooABWQ0bKvbV-KNI93Bi5vfU81hzXdl03g4&_rd_)



An open-source satellite image dated August 10, 2018 shows the presence of a barrier adjacent to the school consisting of two armored vehicles ranging in length from 6 to 8 meters and a width of about 2.5 meters, which is similar to a number of Egyptian armored vehicles such as Crocodile 1. The length of the other vehicle is between 4 to 5 meters, which is also similar to the Egyptian military armor. The method of stopping the three armored vehicles by the width of the road is to turn the road into a fulcrum or checkpoint to prevent crossing through it.



Image 56: An image dated October 8, 2018 shows the presence of Egyptian police armored vehicles in front of the school entrance.

Photos installed from an exclusive video obtained by the foundation show military fortifications on top of the school's roof and what appears to be a checkpoint in front of the school. These fulcrums match the satellite images.



Image 57: An image dated 4 March 2021 showing fortifications on the roof of the school in addition to a checkpoint in front of the school gate.

## Ahmed Abu Salma School

It is located in Sheikh Zuweid city, and it is about 500 meters away from AL-Zuhour Sports Square, a sports facility that includes playgrounds and halls for practicing various sports, acquired by the army and turned it into the main army camp in Sheikh Zuweid city, known as "Al-Zuhour camp", since 2013 until the moment of publishing the report.<sup>108</sup>

According to one of the teachers at the school, the beginning of 2017 witnessed the army forces closing the school to students and turning the building into a military barracks and a residence for a large number of soldiers, where the school rooms were provided with a large number of beds. Sand fortifications were also established around the school and military structures on top of it, so that the school became, for 6 years, since January 5, 2017 until the moment of publishing the report, a supplementary military base for Al-Zuhour military camp near the school.<sup>109</sup> The foundation managed to get an exclusive photo of the

<sup>108</sup> For more details, see the report "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai!" Human Rights Watch, May 28, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/28/if-you-are-afraid-your-lives-leave-sinai/egyptian-security-forces-and-isis>

<sup>109</sup> A post published by the "Sinai News Now" page via Facebook, publication date January 5, 2017, access date September 17, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/sinainewsnw/posts/pfbid024GUiPTA7pW9trk261VvVKEiBzwEhVTzGyobK76arWK2toXaoTkZpb2LbiMaLs1y7l>





school in January 2023, which clearly shows the presence of military structures on the roof of the school.



Image 58: an exclusive image taken via a confidential source during 2023.

The latest private satellite images, obtained by the foundation on August 4, 2023, indicate the continued presence of sand fortifications in the vicinity of the school, with the continued presence of military structures on top of the school roof.

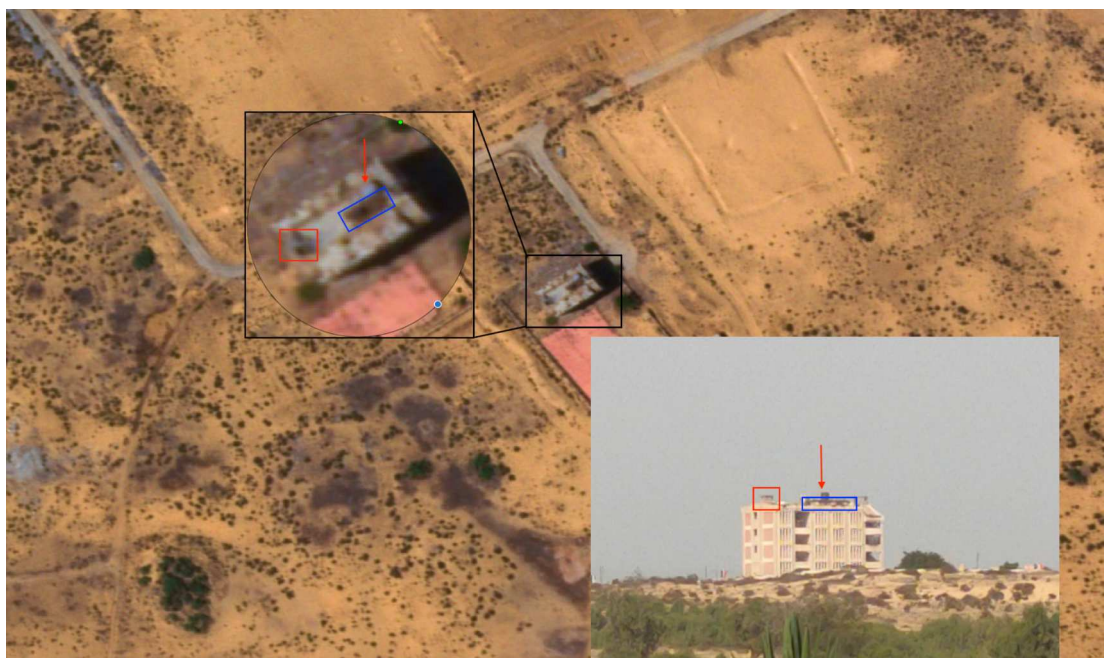


Image 59: A private photo dated August 2023 shows the continued presence of fortifications above the roof of the school. Source: SkySat.

# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade(2013 - 2023)

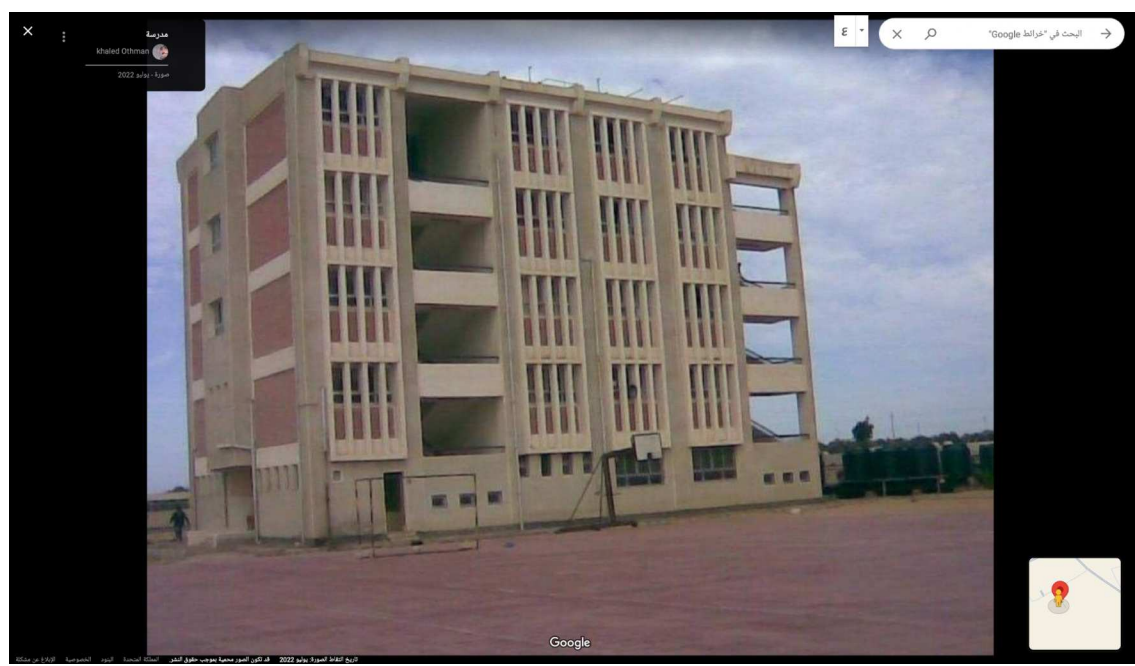
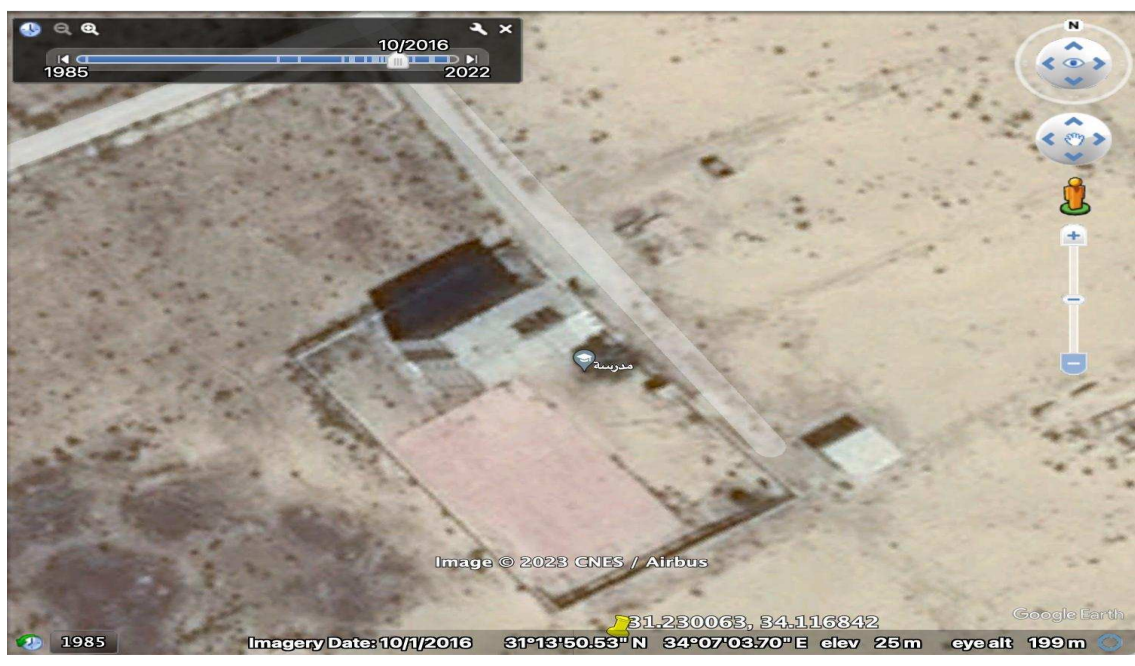


Image 60: A photo from open sources shows the school building before it was closed and converted into a military point. Source: Google Maps.

By examining open-source satellite images, the foundation found that between late 2016 and May 2017, a lot of modifications and fortifications were made to turn the school into a supplementary military base for Al-Zuhour military camp.





# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



The father of one of the students at the school said: *"The government treats us as if we are air or something unimportant, they don't treat us on the basis that we are human beings and that we have lives, children and rights. The Army decided to close the school in 2017 and turned it into a hotel that hosts a large number of soldiers, although Al-Zuhour camp is close to the school and they can build sleeping places for the troops. Is this the only solution for them? There is no other place than where our children learn and forget that there is a war and a curfew and that there are people dying every day? I can tell you for sure that the army does not even see us or think about us even for a moment and treats Sinai as a land without people or where people have no rights. During the war they closed most of Sheikh Zuweid's schools or used them as sniper positions. We inside the city of Sheikh Zuweid are lucky if you compare us with the residents of the villages of Sheikh Zuweid. The schools of the villages are mostly bombed and destroyed by the army, and there is currently no alternative place for children to learn"*.





## C) Al-Arish

The Sinai Foundation has documented instances of the Egyptian military utilizing one school in the city of Al-Arish to support its military operations during the years of armed conflict against the Sinai Province group. This case study, based on compelling evidence obtained from open sources and testimonies from local residents, highlights the military's use of this school for a period of three years while students continued to attend classes within the school, disregarding the best interests of children and failing to adhere to international legal standards.

### **Al-Arish Advanced Industrial Technical School**

Located in Al-Zuhour district south of Al-Arish city, this school is approximately 80 meters away from a sports facility with football fields. In June 2016, the Egyptian military took control of both the school and the sports facility to establish a military outpost. During this time, the military allowed students and teachers to continue their education within the school premises for a duration of three years, until the military vacated the school building in April 2019.

The Sinai Foundation observed that the school's official Facebook page ceased publishing content on May 19, 2016.<sup>110</sup> However, it resumed posting on April 7, 2019, which roughly aligns with the period during which the school was being used for military purposes.<sup>111</sup>

According to one of the teachers at the school, the school administration was taken by surprise when they were informed that the military would establish a military outpost within the school premises on the same day, without prior notice. The teacher added that

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<sup>110</sup> The last post during the year 2016 before the suspension period, where the school's Facebook account published the end-of-year results for the school's first-year secondary school students on May 19, 2016, access date September 1, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/MdrstAlryshAlfnytAlsnaytAlmtqdm/post/pfbid02JnA7cmRTtYTsXeCy9Fqfcr9RkZE2BWAEVqF1q8gCvRJ74VpXHnaSoBkndcfMvPigl>

<sup>111</sup> The first publication after a 3-year hiatus, where the school's Facebook account posted an apology for the interruption period and announced the start of publication again on April 7, 2019, access date September 1, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/MdrstAlryshAlfnytAlsnaytAlmtqdm/post/pfbid0kutM2pHgASPzpm12zcbRtcjmCQqFGWUwAFRHsFzvUrkHwGWVfFusHMNQxCC5eE1yNI>



the period during which the soldiers occupied the school was akin to a nightmare. Gunfire did not cease while students and teachers were inside the classrooms. The teacher also complained about the soldiers' behavior. He further noted that this period witnessed instances of physical assault by the soldiers against students and verbal sexual harassment against female students.

*"We were surprised when the army wanted to enter the school and set up an ambush, and we learned about it when the army was already present at the school. The situation began with the construction of structures resembling towers above the school buildings and the open playgrounds on the opposite side of the street. Then, the school became a parking area for military Hummer vehicles that entered the school premises. Additionally, the military broke the asphalt on one of the streets, which was originally a two-way road, and turned it into a one-way street in front of the school. They set up a checkpoint in the middle of the street, inspecting the cars moving on the road.*

*During the period when the military occupied the school, it was literally a nightmare. You cannot imagine the extent of the shooting, for no apparent reason, coming from above the school. This was happening while the school still had students and teachers, and the atmosphere was terrifying, as if we were in the midst of a war. It was not an educational atmosphere at all. The army's treatment of us inside the school was very harsh. The soldiers were physically searching the teachers, students, and female students, who were already complaining about frequent verbal sexual harassment from incoming and outgoing soldiers. But, of course, nobody dared to object because everyone was terrified during that period. More than once, incidents like these resulted in students being physically assaulted by the soldiers..."*

This is an excerpt from the testimony of one of the school teachers.



Satellite images show the presence of observation towers that appeared on the south side of the school, which was confirmed by local sources of the foundation. In June 2016, satellite images show the construction of one of the towers, as shown in the following image.



**Image 61:** The orange box shows the start of construction of the watchtowers. The presence of the tower is noted in the modern photo on the right compared to the old photo on the left.

Satellite images reveal that another observation tower was erected on the adjacent building in December 2016, both towers are also shown in the June 2017 photo.



**Image 62:** Comparison of three different dates. Photos of December 2016 and June 2017 show the construction of towers to monitor the roofs of the school.

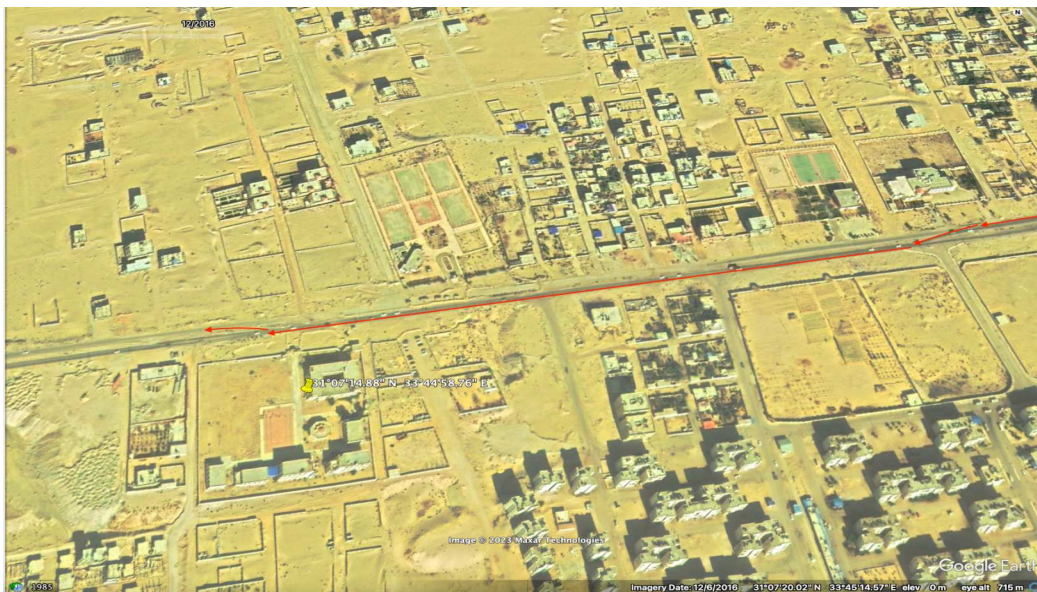




Satellite images also show the construction of fortifications in front of the school door and on the opposite side of the school. It also shows the transformation of the sports facility located opposite the school into a checkpoint. This was accompanied by the closure of one of the lanes of the road heading west, and the conversion of the opposite lane to a dual carriageway for a distance of about 650 meters.



**Image 63:** The Purple lines indicate the sand fortifications erected in front of the entrance to the school and on the opposite side to it. Meanwhile, the presence of five military vehicles appears halfway between the school and the sports facility, where a checkpoint has been established.



**Image 64:** Road diversion due to the presence of the new checkpoint





On March 8, 2022, the school's Facebook account posted a photo from inside the school of Colonel Ahmed saber Al-Mansi, the former commander of the “103rd Commandos” battalion in the Egyptian army, who was killed in armed clashes in North Sinai in 2017. The school's account commented on the photo, noting the presence of Colonel Al-Mansi inside the school earlier.<sup>112</sup>

Satellite images reveal that the blue-colored building, which appears behind Colonel Al-Mansi, was built between February 2014 and June 2016, which indicates that the photo of the commander of the Thunderbolt battalion next to the military vehicle inside the school was taken after 2014.



Image 65: The black arrow indicates the position of Colonel Ahmed Al-Mansi while filming. The blue part of the school building appeared between 2014 and 2016, meaning the photo was taken after 2014.

<sup>112</sup> The school's Facebook account posted a photo from inside the school of Colonel Ahmed saber Al-Mansi, date of publication March 8, 2022, date of Visit September 1, 2023:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MdrstAlryshAlfnytAlsnaytAlmtqdm/photos/pb.100064210682172.-2207520000/5179896388715602/?type=3>



## D) Bir Al-Abd

The Sinai Foundation has documented the use of 14 schools in the city of Bir Al-Abd by both the army and the police to support military and security operations during the years of armed conflict against the Sinai Province group. Among these schools are 12 elementary schools. The army continues to use two of these schools for military purposes as of the time of publishing this report, based on field visits conducted by the foundation's team, testimonies from local residents, and exclusive photographs.

The following examples are case studies of three schools in the city of Bir Al-Abd, revealing through compelling evidence the military's use of these schools for military purposes without considering the best interests of children or respecting international law. In two of these schools, the military used them as military points while students were present, turning these schools into potential military targets for ISIS, endangering the lives of children.

### Mosafaq Preparatory School

The school is located on the international road connecting the cities of Bir al-Abd and Al-Arish in the village of Mosafaq administratively part of Bir Al-Abd city, and is approximately 15 kilometers away from it. According to the testimonies of two village residents, A joint force of the army and the police transformed the school into a military outpost since July 2019, and this continued until the time of publishing this report, all while students were present in the school. The village witnessed armed elements affiliated with ISIS carrying out kidnapping and slaughtering of civilians, in addition to targeting military vehicles with improvised explosive devices.<sup>113</sup>

According to testimonies from local residents and field visits conducted by the foundation's team to the village in 2022 and 2023, the military outpost established within Mosafaq

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<sup>113</sup> For more see the human rights bulletin for the most prominent violations that occurred in April in Sinai, May 9, 2021: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/86>





Preparatory School includes military vehicles in front of the building, military fortifications, and snipers on the school's rooftop to monitor traffic on the international road. Furthermore, soldiers have taken control of the fourth and fifth floors of the five-story school building while children study on the lower three floors. The same sources confirmed that this heavy military presence did not prevent students from continuing their studies inside the school building. However, their parents felt intense fear that the school could become a military target for Sinai Province militants. Eyewitnesses also stated that soldiers treated the building as a military unit, even during the school day, and often fired from inside the school when an attack by ISIS occurred on a nearby target, causing panic among the students. During a visit to the site in September 2023, the foundation documented the continued use of the school by the military for military purposes up to the time of publishing the report.

An image installed from an exclusive video captured in September 2023, shows military fortifications at the top of the Mosafaq Preparatory School buildings and on the 4th and 5th floors. Geographical location matching is shown when comparing satellite images with images obtained by the foundation.



**Image 66:** The captured images clearly show the presence of three observation towers in the Western Building, while the presence of a fortification appears with the entire surface area of the eastern building.



Image 67: Images from a video clip obtained by the foundation that clearly shows the fortifications located on the roofs of the school.

Another satellite image dated July 27, 2022 also shows the construction of a communications tower adjacent to the school, which reveals the same behavior adopted by the government armed forces that the foundation observed in a number of other schools used for military purposes, to facilitate communications between military units.



Image 68: the image shows the presence of a newly built observation tower adjacent to the school, which matches the exclusive video obtained by the foundation. Source: Maxar, dated July 27, 2022.





## Al-Shaheed Hazem Ibrahim Elementary School

The school is located in the "Jael" area, south of Bir Al-Abd city. The official YouTube channel of the Egyptian Ministry of Defense had published a video clip during the school's inauguration on June 22, 2016, in the presence of General Osama Askar, the current Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army.<sup>114</sup> According to interviews conducted by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights with local residents, the army used the school as a military base for more than 3 years, starting from July 2019 until the army evacuated it in March 2023.

According to eyewitnesses, starting from July 2019, the army made modifications to the single-story school building, where they constructed four tall observation towers at the corners of the school. They also increased the height of the outer wall and used several classrooms of the school as quarters for soldiers and storage for weapons. Eyewitnesses further stated that military vehicles were present in the schoolyard during the school day, and soldiers would open fire when they felt threatened or for security purposes while teachers and students were inside the school.

Confirming the incident of military use of the school while students were present, the school's principal, through his Facebook account on September 8, 2019, affirmed that the armed forces had approved the presence of students and teachers in the school in the presence of an army force. The foundation also obtained an exclusive video in 2023 clearly showing the modifications and military fortifications made to the building.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> The Armed Forces inaugurate two new schools and an Azhar institute in the presence of Lieutenant General Osama Askar, who served as Commander of the Unified Command of the East Canal Forces at the time., Egyptian Ministry of Defense, September 27, 2016: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51mzf\\_nlmdY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51mzf_nlmdY)

<sup>115</sup> A Facebook post written by the school's agent via his Facebook account explains that the armed forces have agreed to the presence of students and teachers at the school in light of the presence of an army force there. Publication date September 8, 2019, visit date September 15, 2023: [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0aVrADjy24qXKNk977LRTQcPfygDXysMcNsBZi6WqT67DSgcY37PzqNHYu1xTXujal&id=100009035629255&paipv=0&eav=AfYkicSkh6BaLu8f3Yeo0pLFzNd40GpHEcB9aTfxU-LKmgshNI-tTMT22NrKiCG1s&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0aVrADjy24qXKNk977LRTQcPfygDXysMcNsBZi6WqT67DSgcY37PzqNHYu1xTXujal&id=100009035629255&paipv=0&eav=AfYkicSkh6BaLu8f3Yeo0pLFzNd40GpHEcB9aTfxU-LKmgshNI-tTMT22NrKiCG1s&_rdr)





Over time, the Jael area transformed into an inhospitable environment for residents due to armed conflicts.<sup>116</sup> Military operations resulted in civilian casualties. For example, a young man was killed and another was injured in the Jael area near the military base inside the school on January 15, 2020.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, army vehicles were targeted with explosive devices near the school.

On October 12, 2019, an explosive device detonated in an army vehicle shortly after leaving the school, resulting in casualties. Hours after this incident, an indiscriminate drone strike targeted a civilian vehicle, killing 10 civilians from the same family, including 3 women and 5 children.<sup>118</sup>

Open-source satellite images reveal the radical transformation the school and its surroundings underwent to accommodate military purposes. Buildings north and east of the school were destroyed, and several vehicles can be seen both inside and outside the school in August 2020 and October 2021. Satellite images also indicate the construction of what appears to be surveillance towers on the school's rooftop, likely for reconnaissance purposes. It appears that the military forces removed some of the green areas located east of the school.

Sentinel Hub shows that military activity at the school existed until early 2023, which was confirmed by eyewitnesses who said that the military left the school in March 2023.

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<sup>116</sup> Security sources: dozens killed by ISIS as a result of Egyptian aerial bombardment, Maan News Agency, April 2, 2020: <https://www.maannews.net/news/2002165.html>

<sup>117</sup> An emergency in Sinai due to the "deal of the century" | the fall of a drone in Bir Al-Abd| Sinai Province announces the death of two of its members / a crowd and a meal at a tribal support Conference for Sisi, Mada Masr, January 30, 2020: <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2020/01/30/feature/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A6-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B7-%D8%B7/>

<sup>118</sup> "All We Want is to Live", Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, September 23, 2021: <https://sinaifhr.org//show/98>





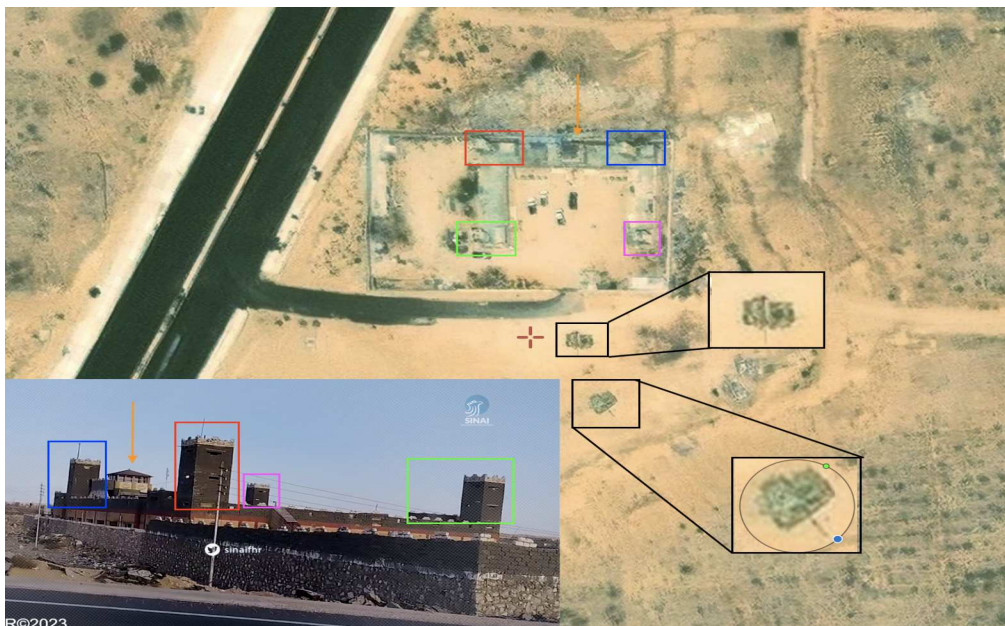


Image 70: Satellite images dated August 22, 2022 show the presence of two military vehicles, one of which is likely a tank. They also show the high towers that were built above the school wall. Source: Maksar.

## Salem Shtewi Joint Preparatory School

According to local residents in the village of Qatiya, located southwest of the city of Bir Al-Abd, following an armed attack on an army camp in the village of Rabea on July 21, 2020, a wave of mass displacement occurred involving thousands of local residents in several villages, including the village of Qatiya. Consequently, the area became a hotspot for armed clashes between the Egyptian army and the Sinai Province group, where the army attempted to expel the group from the area and establish military bases.

The Egyptian army forces transformed the Salem Shtewi Joint Preparatory School in Qatiya into a military base in the period from late August to December 5, 2020. During this period and after the return of the people to the village, the school's students were using the Ghanem Shabana School building in Qatiya village to study in the evening.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> A Facebook post documenting the date of return of Salem Shtewi School students to study at their school, publication date December 5, 2021, access date September 12, 2023:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/381814662594561/permalink/1063129841129703/>





In video footage from open sources capturing the moment when local residents returned to the village after months of displacement, a military tank can be seen positioned inside the school, with the surrounding school wall removed. Additionally, the Egyptian flag can be observed on the tank's turret, along with soldiers in military uniforms.<sup>120</sup>

The foundation was able to geolocate the school by matching footage from the video with satellite images of the school itself to prove that it was used militarily.



Image 71: a snapshot from a video in which the school building and its fence are shown, as well as the trees surrounding the school.

<sup>120</sup> A Facebook post showing a video documenting the moment the people of Qatiya returned to their village and shows the school building while there are army troops and a tank inside, date of publication October 13, 2020, date of access September 12, 2023: <https://www.facebook.com/100002809548106/videos/2816249071812050/>



Image 72: A satellite image in 2023 showing the geographic location of the school identical to its location in the video.

## Al-Ganayen Primary School and Al-Ganayen Preparatory School

According to local residents in the village of Al-Ganayen, located southwest of Bir Al-Abd city, following an armed attack on an army camp in the village of Rabea on July 21, 2020, a wave of mass displacement occurred for thousands of local residents in several villages, including the village of Al-Ganayen. The area subsequently became a spot for armed clashes between the Egyptian army and the Sinai Province group. The army attempted to expel the group from the area and establish military outposts. Egyptian army forces converted both Al-Ganayen Primary School and Al-Ganayen Preparatory School in the village of Al-Ganayen into military outposts between late August and December 7, 2020, while the schools remained closed for renovation until February 2021.

During this period, and upon the return of the local residents, Major General Dr. Mohammed Abdel Fadil Shousha, the Governor of North Sinai, announced the postponement of classes multiple times in 17 schools in various villages in Bir Al-Abd for





the purpose of school renovation and decontamination from the remnants of military operations to ensure the safety of the students.<sup>121</sup>

According to eyewitnesses who spoke to the Sinai Foundation, the army began using these schools as military outposts starting in late August 2020. According to open-source satellite images, this situation persisted until December 2020. In the following images from Google Earth Pro dated July 2021, after the schools were vacated by soldiers, sand barriers surrounding the schools can still be seen, which were not present around the schools before their military use.



Image 73: The arrows indicate the fortifications used around the school as shown in the satellite image dated July 27, 2021.

A screenshot from a propaganda video published by the Sinai province group entitled "bleeding campaigns" in December 2020 shows the presence of soldiers in military uniforms inside the building of Al-Ganayen school, which the school verified by comparing the images in the organization's propaganda film with exclusive photos obtained by the foundation in 2023.

<sup>121</sup> A new decision to extend the postponement of study in 4 regions of North Sinai, masrawy, November 15, 2020: [https://www.masrawy.com/news/news\\_regions/details/2020/11/15/1912843/-/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-4-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1](https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_regions/details/2020/11/15/1912843/-/%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-4-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1)



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



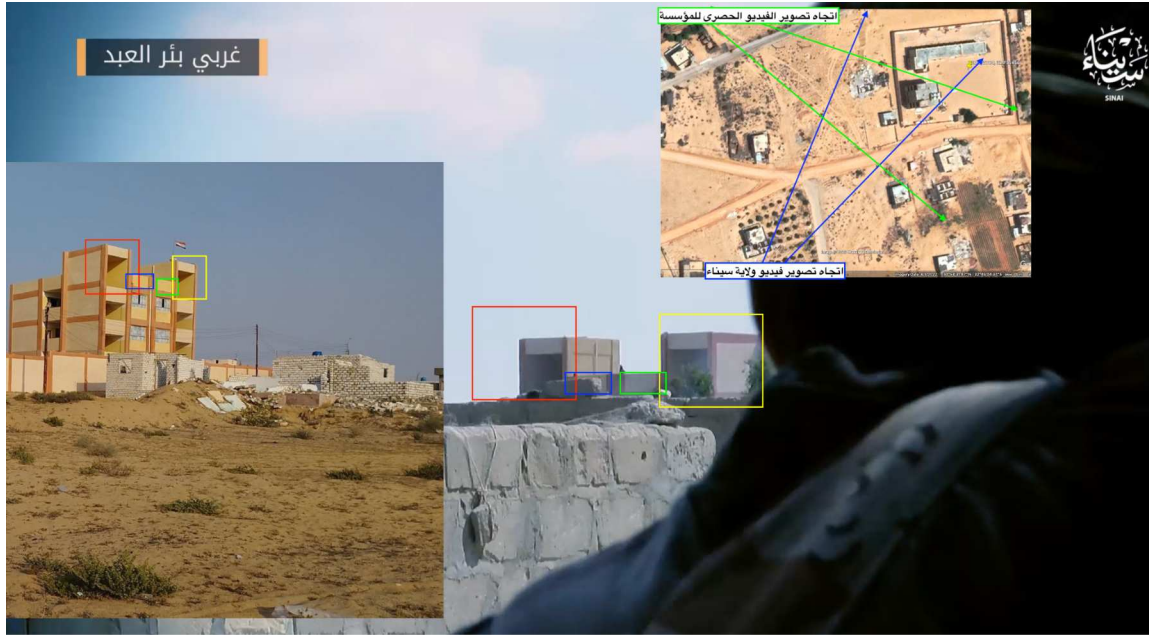
Image 74: Screenshots from a video published by the Sinai Province group showing the school buildings, which are most likely used militarily by army forces.



The matching between the photos proves that ISIS targeted Egyptian army soldiers stationed inside the school

# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



Geographical analysis of the Sinai Province video shows a match between the targeted school and Al-Ganayen School. The school has a distinctive shape with two upper floors on both sides of the building. In addition, the shape of the front facade and the level of the windows match the floors adjacent to it.

An exclusive video obtained by the foundation in 2023 shows the facade of the school that appeared in the video shared by the militants.





*"When we returned to the village, the scene was as follows: we found army barracks on top of the school, a line of sand barriers surrounding the school, and military bases and sand barriers on the second floor of the school. Both the primary and preparatory schools were within the same perimeter, but the buildings clearly showed signs of damage and clashes to the extent that the southern part of the preparatory school had collapsed due to the impact."*

Excerpt from an interview with a local resident in the village of Al-Ganayen.

## **E) Al-Hassana**

The Sinai Foundation documented the use by army forces of 8 schools in the city of Al-Hassana in support of the military operations of the Army during the years of armed conflict against the Sinai province group. All these schools are in the stages of elementary education. Two of those schools are still being used by the military for military purposes at the time of publishing this report, according to field visits by the foundation's team and testimonies of local residents. They are Bir Bada school for elementary education and Al-Azazamah Joint Primary School.

The following examples are two case studies of two schools in the city of Al-Hassana, which reveal through irrefutable evidence that the army used these schools for military purposes for long periods of time without taking into account the best interests of children or respecting the rules of international law.





## Al-Khereza Joint Primary School

The school is located in the border village of Al-Khereza, which is 15 kilometers from the Israeli border, and about 67 kilometers away from the administrative center of Al-Hassana. The vicinity of the village had witnessed the Sinai province group carrying out several armed attacks against the Egyptian army forces.<sup>122</sup> The group has also expanded its attacks against civilians it describes as collaborators with the army.<sup>123</sup> The army responded to these attacks by carrying out strikes against elements it described as belonging to ISIS, in addition to an expanded campaign of arrests and aerial bombardment, which residents described as indiscriminate.<sup>124</sup>

Locals of the region were forced to move to other areas under the burden of abuse from both sides of the conflict. As these attacks continued, the army forced the remaining residents of the village and its affiliated communities to leave at the end of 2016. Later, the army demolished civilian homes and set up a military base inside the school, according to two certificates obtained by the foundation from residents of the village.

The digital Investigations Laboratory at the foundation was able to determine the geographical location of the school through exclusive images obtained by the foundation for the village and the school in 2023 compared to open-source satellite images. The shooting angle indicates the presence of the demolished building with red markings and a distinctive electric power pole on the line of sight.

<sup>122</sup> ISIS adopts targeting the army in Sinai, Al Jazeera, March 3, 2016:

<https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2016/3/3/%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%89-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%81%D9%8A>

<sup>123</sup> Terrorism opens a new front in central Sinai..The army declares revenge and kills 15 Takfiris, Akhbarak, March 26, 2017:

<https://akhbarak.net/news/10652941/articles/24847236/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AD-%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86>

<sup>124</sup> 17 gunmen killed in Sinai, Ma'an News Agency, April 29, 2016:

<https://www.maannews.net/news/844383.html>



Image 75: An image from an exclusive video of Al-Khereza village and school shows the presence of military fortifications on the roof of the school and a demolished house, as well as other destroyed houses appear in the video.

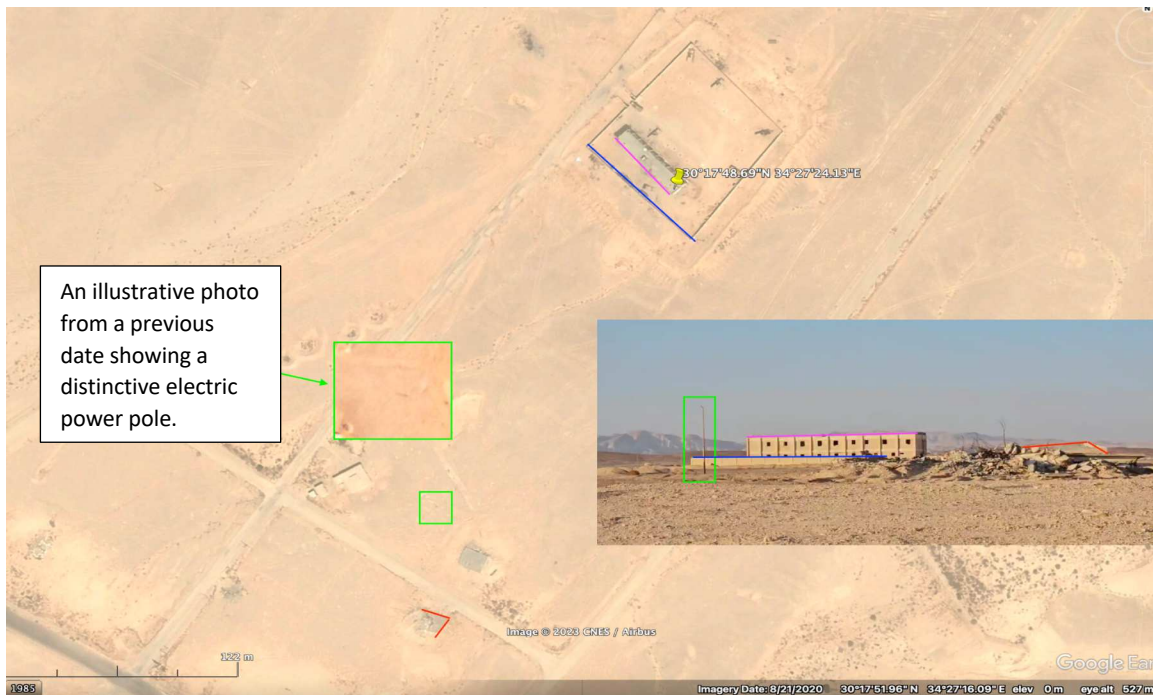


Image 76: geolocation of Al-Khereza Primary School after matching field and satellite images.

The oldest available high-quality satellite images dated December 2018 and the latest images dated August 2020 show the presence of sand fortifications around the school, in addition to the presence of a number of armored vehicles inside the school wall itself, which corresponds to the testimonies of local residents obtained by the foundation.



# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



Image 77: The oldest available high-quality satellite images show the presence of fortifications and armored vehicles inside the school since Dec. 2018



Image 78: Available satellite images show the continued presence of fortifications and armored vehicles inside the school in August 2020.





## Bir Bada School Joint Elementary School

The school is located in the border village of Bir Bada, which is 14 kilometers from the Israeli border, and about 60 kilometers away from the administrative center of Al-Hassana. The vicinity of the village had witnessed armed attacks against the Egyptian army forces launched by ISIS.<sup>125</sup> The group has also targeted water and electricity sources and kidnapped and killed civilians, making the living conditions of the local population even more difficult.<sup>126</sup> According to interviews with locals, the army expanded an army military base in the vicinity of Bir Bada village to include a school and a health center in mid-2016.

With the continued occurrence of armed attacks on Army ambushes, the army forced the residents to leave the village, and also demolished about 100 houses between 2017 and 2019, according to two testimonies from locals, as well as satellite images. Satellite images show the presence of a fulcrum and an army ambush near the school. The point was established before September 2016 according to the chronology of satellite images.

Open data from openstreetmaps suggests that the military build-up shown in the satellite images is an ambush at Bir Bada. The base is only about 250 meters away from the school. The fortifications have extended to include the construction of a communication tower and the construction of other pillars inside the school during 2019. High-quality satellite images also show the continued presence of the wireless communication tower inside the school campus in July 2019, as well as military fortifications above the school and sand fortifications around it. The photos also show the destruction of dozens of houses near the school.

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<sup>125</sup> Mohammed Hussein, details of the martyrdom of two officers and recruits in a terrorist attack in Al-Hassana in central Sinai, Youm7, August 22, 2016:<https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/4/9/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%89-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7/2667105>

<sup>126</sup> Muhammad Hussein, Unidentified persons blow up a water well in central Sinai, Youm7, August 22, 2016:<https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/8/22/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1/2853386>

# Mines of the Future

Violations of the Right to Education  
in North Sinai in the War Decade (2013 - 2023)



Image 79: An image dated January 7, 2019 shows the construction of a wireless communications tower inside the school and the extension of the sand fortifications to include the entire perimeter of the school. Source: Google Earth Pro.

While the latest available photos in May 2021 show the presence of Egyptian armored vehicles and a tank around the school, indicating that the point has continued to be used as a military base in recent years.

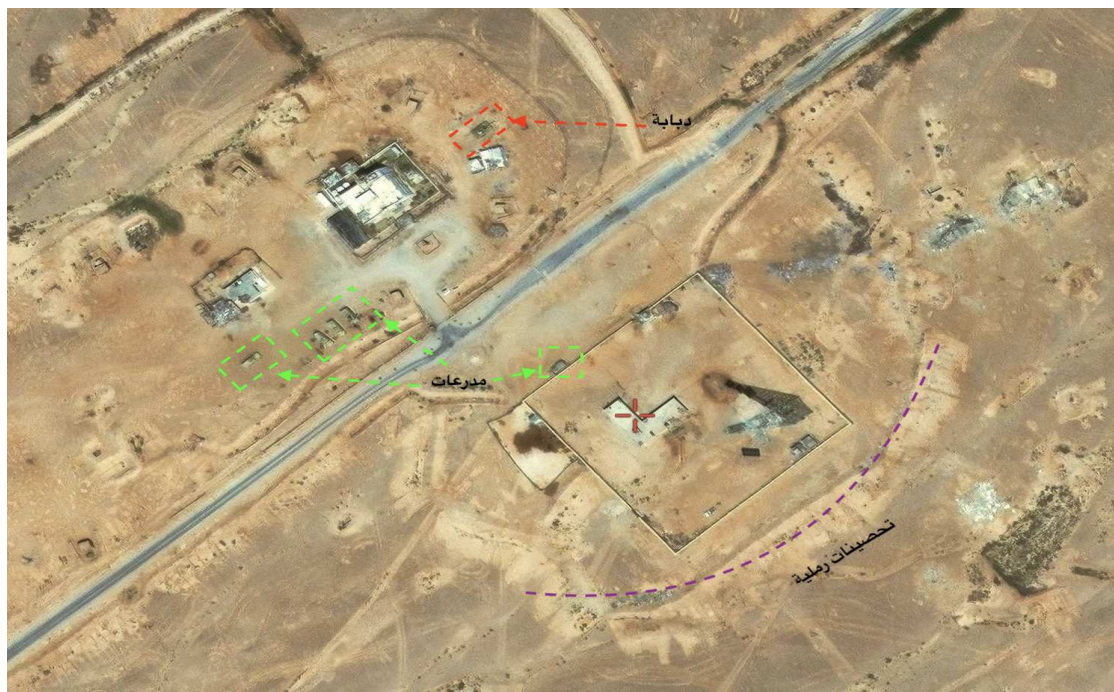


Image 80: An image dated May 23 shows the presence of Egyptian armored vehicles and tanks in 2021. Source: Maxar.



## Fourth: Closing Schools Due to Forced Displacement

Between late 2013 and July 2020, the Egyptian military destroyed at least 12,350 buildings, mostly houses, in the conflict-torn North Sinai governorate. The army has also bulldozed, damaged, and blocked access to at least 6 thousand hectares (about 14,300 acres) of agricultural land, most of it since mid-2016. The government did not provide enough information other than the widespread claims in the media that the evictions and demolitions were necessary for security in the long-term fighting with the Sinai province group. Thousands of these evictions and demolitions appear to violate the laws of war, which prohibit such actions, except for imperative military necessity or to ensure the security of the civilians involved.

Studies were stopped for different periods in a number of schools in different cities of North Sinai due to forced displacement or displacement of residents to escape armed clashes and restrictions imposed by the army on the flow of food or fuel, cutting off water, electricity, telecommunications and other services, which made their lives harsher and forced many to leave the area.

The foundation was able to document the closure of 7 schools in the vicinity of the cities of Sheikh Zuweid, Rafah, Bir Al-Abd and Al-Hassana. This number represents the aspect that the foundation's team was able to monitor, but the actual number remains larger than that. These conditions have resulted in large numbers of children dropping out of formal education, the emergence of psychological and social problems arising from their poor integration into alternative schools in the areas to which they have been displaced, both inside and outside Sinai, and the practice of various forms of discrimination and bullying against them.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Two personal interviews conducted by the foundation with a teacher and the family of one of the students in two different areas revealed that displaced students from Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid villages were subjected to bullying cases due to the different dialect and culture when trying to integrate into a West Sinai School and another school in one of the Egyptian governorates.





The following examples are a case study of two schools in different areas of North Sinai, revealing the facts of school closures in the context of forced displacements or displacement of local residents due to armed clashes.

## **Al-Amal Joint Primary School**

Al-Amal School is located in the Salah El-Din community of Al-Barth village, south of Rafah city. The residents of the village were displaced after an armed attack with a guided missile targeted a military vehicle of the Egyptian army at the Salah El-Din rally in 2016. The village was subjected to an extensive campaign of arrests and indiscriminate shelling in response to the Sinai Province attack, forcing the residents to flee in masses to various areas inside and outside Sinai. As a result, the school was closed for 5 years since the end of 2016. The Rafah educational administration enrolled students of Al-Amal school after closing it on Al-Wehda School, which is about 8 kilometers from the village of Salah El-Din. According to an interview with a teacher at the school, most of the students at Al-Amal school have been displaced with their families to distant areas and their children have not been able to attend school during the past years, and students' attendance was limited to the exam period, so that they could move for the next academic year.

The Foundation's team was able to conduct a field visit to the village on two occasions, in March 2022 and June 2023, and documented the continued closure of the school to students during the academic year, despite the return of the vast majority of the residents to the village during the last two years. The Foundation later monitored the local authorities reopening the school in September 2023 for the first time after a seven-year closure.



Image 81: A still image from an exclusive video obtained by the foundation in April 2023, showing the condition of the school after it was closed for five years.

*"Before the attack things in the village were very quiet. In the winter of 2016, ISIS militants fired a cornet missile at an army armored vehicle parked 200 meters from Al-Amal school. The armored vehicle burned completely, and its passengers' bodies were charred. Immediately after the attack, the army fired indiscriminately at the village and it was a very difficult night, thank God it passed well. The next day, the army randomly arrested people from the outskirts of the village. Then all the locals knew that the area was no longer safe, and that the army would consider all of us suspects, especially since the attack happened using a cornet rocket, which is rare in Sinai, so people decided to leave. A few people left for villages near Al-Barth area, but I, as well as most of the people from the village, left to other governorates. I teach my children at home, and when they have exams, we take them to Al-Wehda School, which has become an alternative for their previous school. But there are other families whose circumstances are difficult, and their children have not completed their education."*

- An interview with a parent of two students at the school.



## Qasrouit Joint Primary School

Qasrouit Primary School is located in the Qasrouit community of the village of Najliya, southwest of the city of Bir Al-Abd. The residents of the village were displaced following the deterioration of the security situation in the village and its surroundings.<sup>128</sup> The organizations carried out several attacks against army forces in the vicinity of the village. For example, on April 9, 2020, the Sinai Province group announced, through ISIS' Al-Nabaa' newspaper, its responsibility for several attacks targeting specific sites, concentrated in the Qasrouit area, and published those operations under the title "Bir Al-Abd swallows the vehicles." It also kidnapped a number of village residents under the pretext of their cooperation with the Egyptian army.<sup>129</sup>

According to an interview conducted by the foundation with a resident of the village, in confronting these attacks, the army relied on strict security campaigns that expanded the circle of suspicion and carried out random mass arrest campaigns. Press reports also indicated that the army besieged the village of Qasrouit and cordoned it off for several days in early March 2020, then carried out search campaigns on homes and arrested dozens of residents, most of them were released after days. During the military campaign, a child in the Qasrouit area was injured by unknown-source gunshots. He was transferred to Bir Al-Abd Hospital and placed in intensive care, according to a report published by the Mada Masr news website.<sup>130</sup>

In June 2020, under the weight of these events, the residents were forced to flee for their lives to different safer areas in Bir Al-Abd, and the school has been closed since then until

<sup>128</sup> Egypt- 5 Gunmen Killed in Bir Al-Abd, Maan News Agency, April 21, 2021:

<https://www.maannews.net/news/2037967.html>

<sup>129</sup> Tarek Fahmy, When Will Terrorism Stop in Sinai, Independent Arabia, May 8, 2020:

<https://www.independentarabia.com/node/118041/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%84/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%89-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%9F>

<sup>130</sup> The Sinai War Reaches "Bir Al-Abd", Mada Masr, May 1, 2020:

<https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2020/05/01/feature/%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a9/%d8%ad%d8%b1%d8%a8-%d8%b3%d9%8a%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%a1-%d8%aa%d8%b5%d9%84-%d8%a8%d8%a6%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%a8%d8%af/>





the time of publishing the report, although the residents returned to the village, which was monitored by media reports in early 2021. According to an eyewitness interviewed by the foundation, the army was still stationed inside the Qasraout community when the residents returned. The foundation also obtained exclusive videos showing the vandalism of the school's contents, the destruction of student seats and the presence of sandbags inside some classrooms, such as those used by the army in military fortifications.

In June 2020, under the weight of these events, the residents were forced to flee for their lives to different safer areas in Bir Al-Abd, and the school has been closed since then until the time of publishing the report, although the residents returned to the village, which was monitored by media reports in early 2021 gradually until the full return of the population in October 2022.<sup>131</sup> According to an eyewitness interviewed by the foundation, the army was still stationed inside the Qasrouit community when the residents returned. An exclusive video showing the vandalism of the school's contents, and the presence of sandbags inside some classrooms, such as those used by the army in military fortifications.

*A resident of the village said: "when we returned, we found the army camped above the village mosque and some of the resident's houses, and inside these fortifications we found the chairs belonging to the school students and the classroom doors. We went to the school and found it in ruins. We also found army sandbags inside classrooms, and chairs broken so they could take their wood and light a wood fire to keep warm. We have been back two years ago, and the school is still closed and no one has tried to repair the damage. our children study in distant schools, without going to school every day, because the distance is very far from the nearest school."*

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<sup>131</sup> "Sinai province" is approaching the Suez Canal to the West.. Its members are surrendering due to hunger and the " Security Initiative " in the East, Mada Masr, January 15, 2021:

<https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2021/01/15/feature/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8/>



Image 82: An image from an exclusive video in September 2023, showing the state of the school after being closed for more than three years.

## Fifth: Recruitment of Children

The long years of conflict have created an incubating environment and motivating factors that have enabled the recruitment and use of children in hostilities by the Egyptian army or pro-government militias in North Sinai. The most important factor is the deteriorating economic conditions, which may have led some children to seek some income for their families. The insecurity that characterized the years of conflict also represented a motivating factor for some children to participate in protecting their communities from the “Sinai Province” group. School dropouts due to attacks on schools by the Egyptian army or the "Sinai Province" group also helped in recruiting children.

The fact that the armed forces informally recruited some children and used them in hostilities against the Sinai Province group, or at least allowed pro-government armed groups to do so, could have contributed to hindering these students from committing to their educational path. Obstructing students from committing to their educational journey is a clear violation of the obligation to respect the right to education, which, contrary to what the armed forces have done, requires states to avoid measures that impede or prevent the enjoyment of the right to education. Allowing pro-government armed groups to recruit children or use them in hostilities indicates that the armed forces are in violation of the



obligation to protect the right to education, which requires states to take measures that prevent third parties from interfering with the enjoyment of the right to education.

The cases documented by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights in a separate report published in August 2023 showed that between 2013 and 2022, the army forces in the North Sinai region recruited children as young as 12 years old, which is most likely a war crime, and the army forces assigned other conscripted children aged 15-18 years to tasks that exposed them to danger in the face of Sinai province elements who hunted down and later killed children. On the other hand, the army forces allowed allied militias to recruit and use children under the age of 18 in hostilities against armed groups, causing some of them to be killed and injured by those groups in the end. The report also refers to a case in which army forces involved a child conscript in hostilities against the Sinai province.<sup>132</sup>

On September 15, 2023, the US government included the Egyptian government for the first time in the list of governments that use child soldiers in military operations in the annual report on human trafficking issued by the US government, which is an important step towards documenting and holding accountable the violations that have been taking place in North Sinai for years without deterrence.<sup>133</sup>

The U.S. government said in the chapter on Egypt in the report that "during the reporting period, a non – governmental organization issued a report that the (Egyptian) government coordinated and conducted joint operations with a militia in the Sinai Peninsula that allegedly recruited and used children, including some of them directly involved in launching attacks."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> For more, see the Sinai foundation for Human Rights Report: "I was afraid ... I was only 17", April 23, 2018: <https://sinaifhr.org//show/204>

<sup>133</sup> US Department of State, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, September 15, 2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

<sup>134</sup> US Department of State, EGYPT (Tier 2 Watch List, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, September 15, 2023: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/egypt>





## Child Mazen Naim Saad Abu Zeina - 16 years old

The Sinai Foundation spoke with a relative of the child Mazen Naim, born in July 2007, who said that Mazen participated in military operations of the army in North Sinai in April 2022, at the time when he was just under 15. Mazen's case clearly shows the disruption of his educational career due to his participation in hostilities on the side of the army. Footages from a source inside the armed tribal groups in which Mazen appeared armed, wearing a military uniform and carrying a walkie-talkie. The videos also show Mazen while he was in joint military campaigns between the army and armed tribal groups supporting him.<sup>135</sup>

One of Mazen's relatives said: *"Mazen was young, he was in the second year of the preparatory stage, but he left school this year and decided to join the military intelligence to volunteer and fight with the army. He initially went without informing me about it and received his weapon. He was not able to shoot like the other fighters because if he holds the weapon in one hand, the weapon will escape from his hand when he shoots. Therefore, he used to hold the weapon well with both hands. Previously, he used to go to take exams in the nearest school, but last year he did not register in school and did not take any exam".*



<sup>135</sup> Tweet about the topic on Twitter, Sinai foundation for Human Rights, September 17, 2023:  
<https://twitter.com/Sinaifhr/status/1703465838928445924>



The following documentation indicates that the Egyptian authorities were most likely aware of the recruitment of these children under the age of 18 into pro-government armed groups, but did not prevent such recruitment or take any measures to ensure their demobilization, in violation of Article 4. Under the Optional Protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

## **Child Ibrahim Al-Menaie - 16 Years Old**

A relative of the child, Ibrahim Al-Menai, told the Sinai foundation that the elders of his tribe managed to recruit him to a local pro-government militia fighting with the Egyptian army against the Sinai province group in the North Sinai region. These elders promised Ibrahim that he would return with his family to their village, from which they were forcibly displaced in 2015 due to the armed conflict in the region, and also promised him that he would receive a membership card of the Sinai Mujahideen Association, which, according to the source, would give him some kind of privileges. On May 3, 2022, Ibrahim appeared injured in his arm in a video that was circulated on social media platforms. Ibrahim said that he was 16 years old and that this injury was caused by a landmine explosion while participating in a reconnaissance in North Sinai.<sup>136</sup> His relative said that Ibrahim died on May 13, 2022, when he was sixteen years old, following the explosion of an explosive device while participating with a joint force of pro-government militias that recruited him and the Egyptian army in a fight with the Sinai province group in the village of Sheikh Zuweid. On May 14, 2022, the official Facebook page of the Sinai Tribal federation named Ibrahim as one of its "fighters and heroes" who died in the "cleansing battle" and announced that along with two others they would be given a military funeral organized by the Egyptian army.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> (Part Eight) The Sons of Sinai are the Correct Number in the Homeland Equation, YouTube video, May 3, 2022

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TO6Cy86E94g&t=265s>

<sup>137</sup> "In the meantime, People of Sinai are Carrying Out the Funeral of the Martyrs of the Cleansing Battle and the Heroes and Fighters of the Sinai Tribal Union, Including a Military Funeral from the Armed Forces," Facebook post, May 14, 2022, <https://shorturl.at/pDKN0>.



## V. ISIS Violations of North Sinai Students' Right to Education

This section of the report documents the violations that have affected the right to education amid the armed conflict in North Sinai, committed by the Sinai Province group between 2013 and 2023. Over the years, the group has launched attacks on students and educational personnel, utilized schools for military purposes, and detonated explosives in some schools, resulting in their partial or complete destruction. Additionally, they have seized educational materials from certain schools, which may have contributed to hindering these students' educational progress.

### **First: Attacks on Students and Educational Staff**

The Sinai Province group launched attacks on students and educational staff in various areas of North Sinai governorate, and the group actions have been partially documented by the foundation. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 35 students and the injury of 43 others, in addition to the killing of 6 educational personnel and the injury of 5 others between 2013 and 2023. These victims were killed or injured as a result of explosive devices planted by the group, originally intended to target army and police forces. However, the shrapnel from these explosions extended to include civilians, or live bullets fired by members of the group during attacks or clashes with security forces, or direct targeting for revenge against students or their family members based on allegations of collaboration with the army and police.

The Sinai foundation documented the death of the child Eid Mohamed Eid Al-Qalji, who was fourteen years old and a high school student when he was killed by an explosive device, likely planted by the Sinai Province group, in October 2020 in the village of Iqteya, affiliated with the Bir Al-Abd center. A relative of the child stated that the explosion





occurred in a palm tree farm, creating a deep hole in the ground. the residents found the remains of the child Eid scattered tens of meters away from the explosion site.<sup>138</sup>

In January 2022, an explosive device, likely planted by the Sinai Province group, detonated in the Al-Ubaydat neighborhood of the Al-Kharuba village, south of Sheikh Zuweid. The explosion resulted in the injury of two children, Mahmoud Ahmed Suleiman and Israa Ahmed Suleiman, according to a relative of the children. The source mentioned that the explosive device detonated while the children were playing on the street near their home. The explosion caused severe leg injuries to Mahmoud, which doctors at Al-Arish hospital later amputated upon the children's arrival at the hospital. Doctors at the hospital removed shrapnel from Israa's body and left other shrapnel in areas of her body where surgical intervention was deemed too risky.<sup>139</sup>

*"Praise God, my brother was well aware of the explosive devices story, and as soon as they returned, he walked over the entire area and cleaned it up a week before. We didn't find anything, and we knew there might be explosive devices, so he cleaned it. When he was sure there was nothing, he let the kids play. They played for less than half an hour until we heard an explosion. We all ran, and the only ones who got injured among those playing were my brother's two sons. His wife screamed when she saw Mahmoud's leg completely amputated, and his other leg was also injured. The locals collected pieces of flesh that had flown and rushed both of them to Al-Arish hospital,"* added one of the relatives.

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<sup>138</sup> An amalgamated return, Sinai foundation for Human Rights, July 25, 2022: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/126>

<sup>139</sup> A human rights bulletin on the most notable abuses that took place in January 2022, Sinai foundation for Human Rights, 03 March 2022: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/127>



In December 2013, armed individuals suspected of belonging to the Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis group opened fire on a military vehicle stationed in front of Abu Zaray School in Sheikh Zuweid, according to local residents. These shots reportedly hit two female students, one in the chest and the other in the leg.

The group also blew up an explosive device targeting an armored vehicle in the Granada area of Al-Arish near a primary school in October 2016, the attack resulted in the damage of the school building and the injury of a teacher and a severe panic among students, according to the testimony of one of the teachers in the school.<sup>140</sup>

Sinai Province committed systematic killings targeting teachers, claiming they were cooperating with Egyptian security forces or for unknown reasons. For example, the Sinai Province group beheaded Sameh Sabry Sweileh, a teacher at Al-Sekka Al-Hadid School for Boys in Sheikh Zuweid, in January 2015, a week after his abduction in Sheikh Zuweid, as reported by local media.<sup>141</sup>

In 2022, the Sinai Foundation spoke to a member of the Sawarka tribe, the same tribe to which Sameh Sweileh belonged. He stated that a week after Sinai Province group abduction of Sameh, his head appeared next to his body in the Najd Square area, south of Sheikh Zuweid. The source added that the Sinai Province group spread the false narrative that Sameh was killed because he confessed to cooperating with the army and providing information about the movements of armed groups in the area.

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<sup>140</sup> Mohamed Abdelazim, today.. Vacation for Primary School Students in North Sinai to Remove the Effects of an Explosion, veto, October 31, 2016: <https://www.vetogate.com/2434548>

<sup>141</sup> Abdel Qader Mubarak, "Bait al-Maqdis" ignores the pleas of "Umm Sameh" and returns her beheaded son, January 16, 2015: <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/641025>



Unknown individuals suspected of belonging to the Sinai Province group kidnapped the headmaster of a primary school on September 4, 2017, in Al-Arish, North Sinai, before releasing him after ten days, according to Mada Masr website.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, unidentified armed individuals opened fire on a bus carrying teachers to their schools on December 17, 2017, in North Sinai, resulting in the death of at least one teacher and injuries to others, as reported by Mada Masr website.<sup>143</sup>

The Sinai Province group also targeted some teachers based on their religious identity. For instance, Coptic teacher Jamal Tawfiq was killed on February 16, 2017, while he was on his way to work at the Al-Samaran School in Al-Arish. He was shot by two men, likely affiliated with Sinai Province group, who were riding a motorcycle, according to Arab News.<sup>144</sup>

The group specifically targeted females, whether students or teachers. On January 13, 2015, suspected members of Sinai Province opened fire on a female teacher in Sheikh Zuweid, North Sinai, resulting in her death, according to “Start Center”.<sup>145</sup> In February 2017, Sinai Province militants intercepted a bus carrying female teachers from Al-Arish to Rafah on two consecutive days. They did this to threaten the teachers and force them to wear specific clothing.

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<sup>142</sup> Mamdouh Suleiman. "Two soldiers killed and 12 injured in a suicide attack on an army checkpoint in Rafah," Mada Masr, September 14, 2017:

<https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2017/09/14/news/u/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A5%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A9-12-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%84/>.

<sup>143</sup> Mamdouh Suleiman. "The targeting of “buses” continues .. A teacher was killed and another injured in North Sinai," Mada Masr, December 17, 2017:

<https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2017/12/17/news/u/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85/>.

<sup>144</sup> "Militants kill Christians in Sinai, second in a week," Arab News, February 18, 2017.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1055926/%7B%7B>

<sup>145</sup> "Egypt: Unidentified Assailants Shoot Teacher in North Sinai," *AllAfrica*, January 13, 2015.

<https://allafrica.com/stories/201501140871.html>.





These incidents were reported based on testimonies from the teachers and media reports.<sup>146</sup>

*“The incident occurred on Wednesday, February 22, 2017, in the Abu Shinnar area in Rafah. Three armed individuals stopped the teachers’ bus and explicitly ordered us to have a male guardian with us from our family and to wear the niqab. They also instructed that men must grow their beards; otherwise, they will apply limits of God on us,”* said one of the teachers.

## Second: Demolition and Destruction of Schools

The Sinai Province, an ISIS-affiliated group, violated the right to education for the students of North Sinai by detonating and completely destroying some schools. This constitutes a violation that could amount to a war crime under international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. The group also violated the rules laid out by international humanitarian law, which require parties to the conflict to take necessary precautions to protect schools from the dangers resulting from military operations. According to a monitoring operation conducted by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights on the attacks carried out by the Sinai Province group against educational facilities, the foundation documented 4 school bombings in the cities of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid between 2013 and 2023.

The following examples are case studies of two schools in different areas of North Sinai, revealing through compelling evidence that the Sinai Province carried out the demolition of these schools without considering the best interests of the children or respecting the rules of international law.

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<sup>146</sup> Omar Saeed “Details of Sinai Province’s interception of a Rafah teachers’ bus...twice,” Mada Masr, February 27, 2017. <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2017/02/27/news/u/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D9%85%D8%B9/>



## Al-Awaida Joint Preparatory School

The school is located in the village of Al-Dhahir, south of the city of Sheikh Zuweid. The vicinity of the village has witnessed recurring armed clashes between the military and the Sinai Province group. On May 22, 2015, militants affiliated with ISIS detonated the Al-Awaida Preparatory School and a nearby residential building that served as accommodation for some of the school's teachers and their families.<sup>147</sup> A village resident told the Sinai Foundation that gunmen showed up on Friday morning at the weekend and warned nearby residents of the school that they would detonate the buildings within an hour, claiming it was to prevent the military from accessing the rooftops of these buildings to target the group members. An eyewitness added that ISIS militants forced residents of the residential building adjacent to the school to evacuate their homes. They then placed barrels containing explosives inside the school and the residential building, remotely detonated them, and withdrew from the area.

Al-Youm Al-Sabea news website close to the government, citing an Egyptian security source, said, "the groups that blew up a school and a residential building in the Sheikh Zuweid area are elements of the Bait al-Maqdis group, with the aim of blowing up the school and residential architecture so as not to be taken as a staging point for troops, and the source explained that the troops began to be stationed on the roofs of high-rise buildings in villages, and the location of this school in a high place and control over the building and dealing from above with these elements is very important, so it was blown up."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Mohammed Hussein, terrorists blow up a school and a residential building in the village of Al-Dhahir south of Sheikh Zuweid, May 22, 2015:

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/5/22/%D8%A5%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF/2192482>

<sup>148</sup> Mohammed Hussein, Black terror operations continue in Sinai.. Terrorists blow up a school and a building empty of residents in the afternoon in Sheikh Zuweid.. Eyewitnesses: masked men planted canisters and detonated them remotely.. Source: "Bait Al-Maqdis" behind the incident,, May 22, 2015:



The foundation's Digital Investigation Laboratory was able to locate the geographical location of the school through exclusive videos of the school's ruins in 2022 and 2023, compared to open-source satellite images. The latest videos obtained by the foundation in 2023 indicate that the Egyptian government has completed the establishment of an alternative school in the same location as the destroyed Al-Awaida Preparatory School.



Image 83: The black arrow in the middle of the image indicates the shooting position. Both images on the right side of the picture are from the east, while the picture on the left half of the picture is from the west side of the school.

The exclusive video was filmed from inside the new school building, and the cameraman moved to the west and east. The geographical correspondence of the buildings located to the east of the school, that is, on the right side of the picture, confirms that the photography was actually done from inside the new school.

Open-source satellite images also show Al-Awaida School being destroyed between May and November 2015, which corresponds to the eyewitness account.





Image 84: On the right, the school is shown before demolition. While on the left, it is shown after being destroyed.

Post-demolition photographs show that the school was deliberately targeted, as there are no visible signs of demolition of the surrounding buildings.



Satellite images in March 2016 showed demolition operations in a number of other surrounding buildings, and their pace increased until they reached the demolition of buildings located west of the school in July 2019 images.

*“The story goes that the Al-Awaidah Preparatory School is the highest point in the entire village of Al-Dhahir, as well as the adjacent building. The extremists believed that the military would use it as a base to fight them, so they decided to blow it up. On an early Friday morning, we*



*were surprised to see masked gunmen in SUVs and motorcycles arriving in the village. They went to the homes of the villagers near the school, informing them that they would blow it up in an hour. They also went to a nearby government building where some teachers and village employees lived, telling them to evacuate the building. The residents couldn't take much with them, only grabbing a few lightweight belongings. The gunmen had barrels with wires in them, which they placed inside the school and the building, then moved away from the area. They detonated them and disappeared. After the Preparatory School was destroyed, the students had nowhere to study and took their end-of-year exams in the village mosque. The primary school had also been damaged due to artillery shelling from the military's "Hassan" checkpoint nearby. When the soldiers had free time, they used to amuse themselves by shooting teachers, almost. Before the Takfiris destroyed the preparatory school, they had clashed with a military campaign that was passing through the area along the Sheikh Zuweid/Al-Goura road. They entered the school for cover and ended up on its rooftop, shooting at the campaign and the students inside.”*

- Part of an interview with a resident of the village of Al-Dhahir

## **Al Moqataa Joint Preparatory school**

The School is located in the village of Al-Moqataa, south of Sheikh Zuweid city. The city turned into a conflict zone early in the conflict, as Al-Moqataa is considered the hometown of several prominent jihadist leaders in Sinai. The village became a battleground between extremist elements and the Egyptian army. The military used aerial weapons to target objectives in the village in the early months of the conflict in late 2013.<sup>149</sup> Armed

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<sup>149</sup> The Egyptian army continues to carry out operations in North Sinai for the 17th day, Al-Raya, September 23, 2013: <https://www.raya.com/2013/09/23/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84->



operations continued in and around the village, escalating until their peak in 2015. The Sinai Province group detonated the preparatory school in the village, claiming it was to prevent the army from establishing a military presence inside the village.<sup>150</sup> According to a local resident who spoke to the foundation, armed individuals planted explosive devices inside the preparatory school building and detonated them on September 23, 2015. This was corroborated by reports in the media at the time.<sup>151</sup>

The foundation obtained exclusive video footage in 2023 showing the wreckage of the preparatory school, and it verified the school's location through satellite imagery.



Satellite images show the school being attacked in two phases, the first occurring before 29 November 2015 resulting in damage to parts of the school building, and a clear

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/12/23/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1/2506036>

<sup>150</sup> Mohammed Hussein, gunmen blow up a school and a house south of Sheikh Zuweid in Sinai, December 23, 2015:

<https://www.youm7.com/story/2015/12/23/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B2%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1/2506036>

<sup>151</sup> Ahmed Abu Daraa, Takfiri elements blow up a school and a house in Sheikh Zuweid, Al-Masry Al-Youm, December 23, 2015:

<https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/862128>

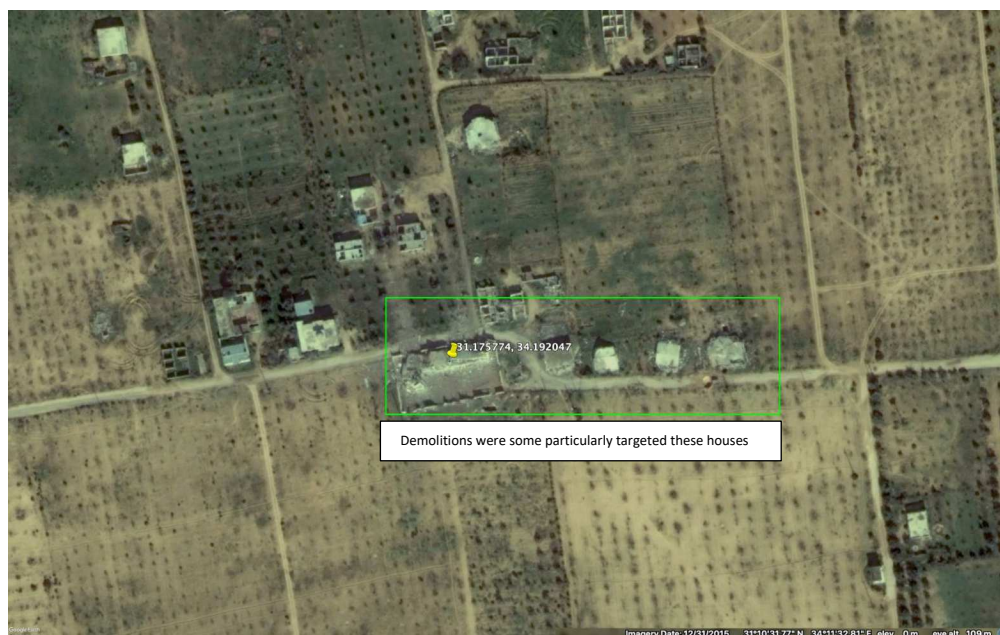




demolition in its southern wall. The second phase occurred during December 2015, when satellite images on December 26, 2015 show the complete destruction of the school.



The following photo, dated December 31, 2015, shows that the school and some of its adjacent buildings from the east were particularly targeted due to the fact that they were subjected only to demolitions without other nearby houses.





One of the village residents said, *"Education came to a halt in the school in 2015 due to the frequent incidents and indiscriminate violence from both the army and the militants. Drones occasionally come and bomb people, and then the army would throw grenades, causing casualties. Some people fled the village, leaving only a few behind, taking their children with them. The school building itself was hit by a missile; we don't know the source, but it happened at night when there were no students. Afterward, the teachers became afraid and stopped coming to the school, and the remaining students left with their families. Then, the militants were afraid the army might set up an ambush on the school, so they planted explosive devices and blew up the school, leaving it in ruins"*.

### Third: Military Use of Schools

The Sinai Province group's use of schools to support its military activities involves using them as hideouts or focal points for attacks and surveillance. School buildings are often the tallest structures in the villages they are located in.<sup>152</sup> According to eyewitness testimonies and security studies, the group military strategy in Sinai did not involve establishing fixed positions within these schools. Instead, they relied on hit-and-run tactics. Sinai Foundation did not observe, through its interviews, press reports, or security studies, any indication that schools or other fixed sites had been occupied by ISIS members for more than a few minutes or hours, in anticipation of their aerial targeting by the army.

All of these practices constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, which prohibits the military use of civilian objects. At the same time, these practices demonstrate that the Sinai Province group did not respect the obligations arising from international

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<sup>152</sup> The report discusses these types of attacks in the section on the legal framework and concludes that most of them are probably illegal as they were mostly unnecessary and disproportionate in relation to attacking a civilian target used by the adversary for military purposes.



human rights law regarding the right to education for the students of these schools. Whereas the schools that the group used for military purposes turn into legitimate military targets temporarily - while the group members are present in them - in accordance with controls set by the legislator.<sup>153</sup>

For example, the foundation documented the use of the Al-Awaida Preparatory School building by members of the Sinai Province group while students and teachers were inside the school in a clash with an army military campaign in the village of Al-Dhahir, south of Sheikh Zuweid, in 2015, without taking into account the best interests of children or respecting the rules of international law, according to an interview with A local resident.

*“In around March 2015, there was a military operation by the army in the village of Al-Dhahir on the Sheikh Zuweid/Al-Goura road. Suddenly, elements from the ISIS group emerged, and they clashed with the campaign. During the clashes, a group of ISIS members entered the secondary school and went up to the school's rooftop, engaging in a firefight with the army. All of this took place while the students were inside the school. Of course, the army responded and opened fire on them, and the children and teachers were terrified, but thankfully, no one got hurt that day”. An interview with a local resident.*

The foundation was able to document the use of two schools in North Sinai by ISIS's Sinai Province group for military purposes.

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<sup>153</sup> The section on the legal framework can be reviewed for a legal analysis of these cases and the specific controls that allow government forces to target facilities of a civilian nature.





## Otallah Zayed Agricultural Secondary School

The school is located in the village of Qatiya, southwest of Bir Al-Abd city. The school documented the use of the Sinai Province group of the school as a field hospital and a headquarters for investigation and torture for several hours between the evening of July 21, 2020, and the following day's noon. The school was subjected to aerial bombardment by the military, leading to the withdrawal of the group members from the school, according to the testimony of one of the local residents who were detained and interrogated inside the school.

The village of Qatiya first came into the spotlight when the Sinai Province group attacked an army camp in the village of Rabea<sup>154</sup>, west of Bir Al-Abd city, on July 21, 2020. Following that attack and the group takeover of several villages southwest of Bir Al-Abd, local residents were forced to evacuate their homes and move to safer areas. They only returned to their villages after the group withdrawal, which occurred after approximately 70 days. The army allowed<sup>155</sup> the villagers to return under its supervision without completely removing the explosive devices and mines that Sinai Province group is believed to have planted before its withdrawal. This led to the death of 16 civilians and the injury of 18 others due to these explosive devices between July 26 and November 18, 2020.<sup>156</sup>

A resident of the village of qatiya said that the first appearance of the group members in his village was about three hours before the start of the attack on the "Rabea" camp, and that they entered the village from the South by about 10 semi-trucks and 15 motorcycles, and they were all armed, and appeared accompanied by a number of women, before they

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<sup>154</sup> Details of the attack on the "Rabea" anchor in Bir El Abd, Mada Masr, July 22, 2020: <https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2020/07/22/news/u/تفاصيل-الهجوم-على-ارتكاز-رابعة-في-بي>

<sup>155</sup> For detailed testimonies on the subject, read the human rights bulletin for the month of October issued by the Sinai foundation for Human Rights: <https://sinaifhr.org//show/33>

<sup>156</sup> "Bir Al-Abd" villages: ISIS canisters and the negligence of the Egyptian authorities are causing new civilian casualties: <https://sinaifhr.org/show/27>



deployed in the village and stationed in and around the agricultural secondary school, which they later turned into a field hospital, according to the Mada Masr website.<sup>157</sup>

*"I left the village with my family on the day of the attack, and almost all the village residents were leaving at that time. The Takfiris were scattered everywhere in the village, moving around freely. On the way, I remembered that I had forgotten an important item at home, and I decided to go back to get it because I was afraid it might get stolen. I went back alone, and when I was near the village, two armed men appeared and started questioning me about why I was returning and why I was holding a phone like I was taking pictures or informing someone. They told me that if I worked with the army, they would kill me. They took me with them after blindfolding me, and when we arrived, they made me sit on the ground and removed the blindfold. That's when I realized I was in the Agricultural School because I had been a student there years ago. I sat there for an hour, and no one spoke to me. Then, a person with a non-local accent, probably from Cairo, entered and started interrogating me for an hour. He searched my phone and read my messages, threatening me that if I didn't confess, they would slatter me. He said it was in my best interest to confess because if they found out from my phone that I knew an officer or had information about the group members, they wouldn't tolerate that. After three hours of being held by them, they told me to leave and to not let them see me again".*

- Interview with a local resident.

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<sup>157</sup> After the "Rabea" attack.. The militants of the " Sinai province " are spreading in the villages of Bir Al Abd and residents are being displaced, Mada Masr, July 27, 2020:



## Iqteya Preparatory School

"Iqteya Preparatory School is located in the village of Iqteya, southwest of the city of Bir Al-Abd. Since mid-2019, Bir Al-Abd has joined the list of areas witnessing escalating attacks and combat between the Egyptian armed forces and the Sinai Province group. The events reached their peak when the Sinai Province group attacked an army camp in the village of Rabea,<sup>158</sup> located west of Bir Al-Abd, on July 21, 2020. After that attack, the Sinai province group was able to impose control over several villages southwest of Bir Al-Abd.<sup>159</sup> Following the Rabea attack and the Sinai Province group control over the villages, local residents were forced to evacuate their homes and move to safer areas. They only returned after the group withdrawal, which took about 70 days.<sup>160</sup>"

The army allowed people to return to their villages under its supervision without completely removing the explosive devices and explosive objects that the Sinai Province group most likely planted before its withdrawal, which led to the death of 16 civilians and the injury of 18 others as a result of these explosive devices during the period between July 26-November 18, 2020.<sup>161</sup>

After the residents returned, they discovered two explosive devices, probably planted by ISIS members, on the roof of the preparatory school, intended to target government forces, according to an interview with a local resident. Following this discovery, local authorities decided to postpone schooling in the village until the school was cleared of the remnants of war. General Dr. Mohamed Abdel Fadil Shousha, the Governor of North Sinai, announced multiple postponements of classes in 17 schools in villages in Bir Al-Abd to

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<sup>158</sup> Details of the attack on the Rabea base in Bir Al-Abd, Mada Masr, July 22, 2020:

<https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2020/07/22/news/u/تفاصيل-الهجوم-على-ارتكاز-رابعة-في-بئر-عبد-المناسا>

<sup>159</sup> ISIS is moving west: Bir Al-Abd villages talk about displacement, Al-Manassa, August 23, 2020:

<https://almanassa.com/stories/4581>

<sup>160</sup> For detailed testimonies on the topic, read the October human rights bulletin issued by the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights:

<https://sinaifhr.org//show/33>

<sup>161</sup> ISIS bombs and the negligence of the Egyptian authorities cause new civilian casualties, Sinai Foundation for Human Rights, November 20, 2020:

<https://sinaifhr.org/show/27>





repair and decontaminate the schools from the aftermath of military operations, ensuring the safety of the students.<sup>162</sup>

*"When ISIS withdrew and we returned to the village, we found landmines everywhere, in houses, among clothes, in the school, and in the health unit in Qatiya. People started searching for any strange objects and reported them to the army or civilians cooperating with the army. One of the villagers found a landmine on the roof of the preparatory school and informed the army. Two days later, the army arrived with a few civilians armed by the army who cooperated with them. They managed to defuse one landmine, but the other was more difficult, so they detonated it in the schoolyard. Nevertheless, schooling was postponed for a while because many civilians died or were injured in the village after our return due to the explosive devices. The school remained closed until the Civil Protection Forces came to inspect it after some time". A local resident in the village of Iqteya.*

## Fourth: Stealing School Funds and Contents

On July 14, armed individuals, likely affiliated with the Sinai Province group, stopped the accountant of Hamdy Awad Primary School in Al-Arish city in front of the school's gate. They seized a sum of 300,000 Egyptian pounds intended for teachers' exam rewards. Then, the armed individuals moved to the nearby Mustafa Hussein School, where they seized an additional 30,000 Egyptian pounds also allocated for teachers.

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<sup>162</sup> Ashraf Swailem, new decision to extend the postponement of study in 4 regions of North Sinai, Masrawy, November 15, 2020: [https://www.masrawy.com/news/news\\_regions/details/2020/11/15/1912843/-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-4-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1](https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_regions/details/2020/11/15/1912843/-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-4-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1)



In June 2014, suspected members of the Sinai Province group carried out an armed attack on a vehicle belonging to the Directorate of Education in North Sinai while it was in Al-Arish city. The attackers seized the vehicle, which was loaded with school books.<sup>163</sup>

The foundation documented that in late 2018, members of the Sinai Province group stormed the Arab Belli primary and preparatory schools in the city of Al-Hassana in central Sinai, where they seized computers and tools from the laboratories of the two schools. This was repeated in the schools of the villages of Qasrouit and Fater in Bir Al-Abd, according to witnesses. Eyewitnesses spoke to the foundation.

On July 12, 2017, 20 masked gunmen stormed Al-Shorbaji Al-Zukhrufiya School in Al-Masaid neighborhood in Al-Arish, and seized oxygen tubes for welding and tools for educational workshops, according to Al-Masry Al-Youm website.<sup>164</sup>

*“In late 2018, when the terrorists entered, they infiltrated the school at night and stole equipment from the science laboratory and computers. When we returned to the school the next morning, we found it in this condition. We went to a military camp nearby and reported what had happened. The military told us that they would investigate and take action. We don't know how the terrorists found out, but after we informed the battalion about what happened a few days later, we found threatening messages written on the walls of the preparatory school warning us not to cooperate with the military”.*

- Excerpt from the testimony of a teacher at Arab Belli School in Al-Hasana.

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<sup>163</sup> Muhammad Mamdouh. “Armed robbery of an education vehicle in Al-Arish.” Veto, June 19, 2014: <https://www.vetogate.com/1077064>.

<sup>164</sup> Khaled Mohammed, armed robbery of AL-Zukhrufiya School in Al-Arish and the seizure of its contents, Al-Masry Al-Youm, July 12, 2017: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1161456>



## VI. Recommendations

### First: To the Egyptian Authorities

#### A. To the Egyptian government forces represented by the army and police:

1- Immediately cease the use of schools for military purposes and evacuate them from any military equipment or security personnel, ensuring the return of students to schools and the secure continuation of the educational process. Furthermore, any security installations near educational buildings should be dismantled and relocated.

2- Lift all exceptional measures, including restrictions on movement, checkpoints not required by the security situation, curfews, and avoid declaring states of emergency or applying exceptional measures except in the narrowest possible time and geographic scope, commensurate with the scale of the emergency. In all cases, the army and police should coordinate with educational directorates to ensure the freedom of movement for students, parents, and education officials, enabling them to return to their schools. Moreover, efforts should be made to reconstruct what has been wholly or partially destroyed during the period of non-international armed conflict in North Sinai.

#### B. To the Egyptian Executive and Judicial Authorities:

1- Accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure, allowing victims and their families to submit individual complaints.

2- Ratify the Safe Schools Declaration, launched in 2015, to prevent attacks on education and mitigate their impact, and ensure that government forces adhere to its guiding principles.





3- Conduct an urgent and transparent investigation into the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by armed tribal groups supporting the military, and ensure the demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of these recruits into the educational process.

4- Announce a comprehensive plan for reintegrating children into the education process, including the restoration, equipping, and operation of schools that have been partially damaged or the construction of new schools to replace those completely destroyed during military operations in various areas of North Sinai.

5- Conduct a transparent and independent investigation and refer to trial all individuals proven to be involved in unlawful attacks on schools, including members of the armed forces and police.

6- Authorities should establish an independent fact-finding and investigation committee, including judges, parliament members, lawyers, human rights advocates, and independent figures, to assess the state of the education process in North Sinai and issue binding conclusions and recommendations to judicial and governmental authorities.

7- Transparency in reporting current education issues in North Sinai, as a human rights matter, including transparent and accurate reporting on the number of remaining and destroyed schools, their capacity, the number of children who have dropped out of education, teacher shortages, and other relevant statistics.

8- The plan should also include practical measures to ensure equal access to education for girls, work to overcome cultural, societal, and government barriers that reinforce discrimination against girls and women, ensure the security of the educational process and its regularity, and facilitate the movement of students and teachers from their residential areas to schools.

9- The plan should also ensure the end of the historical marginalization suffered by the community in North Sinai, including providing decent and secure livelihoods for male and female teachers, fairly distributing them in sufficient numbers across various schools in



North Sinai, rehabilitating new graduates, and providing safe transportation whenever possible. Attractive incentives should also be offered to the educational workforce when joining North Sinai schools to attract strong and excellent cadres.

10- Allow independent humanitarian organizations and relief organizations to operate in Sinai, including the Egyptian Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

11- Lift illegal restrictions on the movement of Sinai residents and commercial activities, ensuring compensation for those affected by necessary restrictions.

12- Invite and accept requests for visits by UN Special Procedures Mechanisms as well as the African Union to Sinai, allowing them unimpeded access, and ensuring non-retaliation against individuals who cooperate with them.

13- Ensure the education and training of military officers and soldiers, through military academy curricula and other training courses, on the principles of international humanitarian law and their compliance with these obligations as part of their professional duties.

14- The Egyptian Parliament should invite residents of North Sinai and activists to public hearings in the parliament to explain their grievances and present their demands.



## **Second: To the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, Special Rapporteurs, Security Council bodies, and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office:**

1- Considering the serious and systematic violations committed by Egyptian government forces over the past ten years, as documented in this report and previous local and international reports, the United Nations Human Rights Council should adopt measures for an international investigation into the violations and attacks committed by all parties to the conflict in North Sinai, including senior Egyptian officials, government security forces, government-affiliated militias, and members of the Sinai Province group.

2- Special Procedures Mechanisms should request visits to Egypt, including North Sinai, in particular the special rapporteurs on: the right to education; the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the right to development; internally displaced persons; truth, justice and reparation. These mechanisms should seek to visit Egypt, provided that the government provides real guarantees to ensure the security of the members of its missions and that they are not subjected to threats and harassment by the security services. It should include in its investigations the assault on the right to education in North Sinai, the historical marginalization to which the Sinai community has been subjected, and all illegal restrictions affecting the right to education, including discrimination against girls and women.

3- The United Nations Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Executive Directorate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the Counter-Terrorism Office should request visits to areas in Egypt, including North Sinai, to hold meetings with all parties, including civil society members, receive briefings from Egyptian officials, and submit reports on their findings to the United Nations Security Council and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. These reports, including those issued by the office, should shed light on the government's national use of counter-terrorism operations to circumvent





international and domestic laws aimed at protecting human rights. The office should report specific cases of human rights violations within the framework of counter-terrorism for further investigation and possible prosecution of those responsible when sufficient evidence exists.

### **Thirdly: To the African Union and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:**

1- Member states of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights should adopt a resolution condemning the violations committed by all parties to the conflict in North Sinai. The Commission should hold the Egyptian government accountable for its failure to promote and protect human rights in North Sinai.

2- The African Peace and Security Council should include Egypt on its agenda and conduct periodic reviews of the human rights situation in the country, particularly in North Sinai.

3- The African Peace and Security Council should also review all military and security arrangements with Egypt, impose a ban on all arms exports to the Egyptian army, cease all security training with Egyptian security forces, and require their resumption only in the presence of evidence of the cessation of grave violations in North Sinai, including war crimes. Reliable steps should be taken to investigate these crimes and prosecute the perpetrators.

4- The Working Group on Indigenous/Community Populations in Africa should request a visit to Egypt, including North Sinai, to study the issue of indigenous populations in North Sinai and the ongoing marginalization that has persisted for decades, property confiscation, and recent forced displacement.



5- The following special mechanisms should request visits to Egypt and submit reports on the results concerning the situation in North Sinai: The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of expression and access to information. These special mechanisms should closely collaborate with the United Nations Special Procedures and the United Nations Human Rights Council.

**Fourth: To partner governments of the Egyptian government, especially the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the European Union, and member states:**

1- These governments should urge the Egyptian government and the Ministry of Defense to ensure that military and security operations adhere to Egypt's commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This includes guaranteeing the right to education and ending all forms of violations that undermine that right and the attacks on education in North Sinai.

2- Review all arms deals and military equipment, as well as dual-use equipment (such as spy technology), and suspend all sales to security units and military forces that are involved in systematic human rights violations. This should continue until these violations are stopped, and those involved are subject to transparent and fair investigation and prosecution.

3- Conduct an official review of the objectives of joint military exercises, their purposes, and their effectiveness, including Egypt's participation in all multinational military exercises. This is to ensure that all skills and training received will be used by Egyptian army units in compliance with international humanitarian law and minimize civilian suffering to the maximum extent possible.

4- In the case of providing financial support and assistance to the Egyptian government to support the educational process, ensure that this support includes marginalized communities such as those in North Sinai. Establish mechanisms to guarantee optimal use



of this support and effective community participation, involving students, teachers, and civil society, in discussing its allocations and utilization.

5- Pressure the Egyptian authorities to immediately open Sinai and allow the work of independent journalists, observers, and humanitarian relief organizations without restrictions.





## VII. Appendixes:

**Appendix 1:** Letter on violations of the right to education, copy to the Minister of Defense, Minister of Education, Chairman of the Education Committee of the Egyptian Parliament, Governor of North Sinai, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education in North Sinai, and President of the National Council for Human Rights.



25 يناير 2023

السيد المحترم د. طارق شوقي وزير التربية والتعليم

تحية احترام وتقدير وبعد،

استنادا على إعلان الحكومة المصرية إلى أن الاستثمارات في قطاع التعليم بشمال سيناء بلغت 240 مليون جنيهها خلال العام الدراسي الجديد (2022 - 2023) وإعلانها عن إنشاء 22 مدرسة، وذلك في إطار تصريحات متعددة لمسؤولين مختلفين، بينهم الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي، تتعلق بالسعي إلى إنفاذ خطة متكاملة للتنمية بشبه جزيرة سيناء تشمل النواحي التعليمية والصحية والاجتماعية لأبناء سيناء، وخصوصًا بعد إعلان الرئيس السيسي عودة الاستقرار الأمني بشكل كبير وقرب نهاية الحرب على الإرهاب، وذلك بعد سنوات صعبة عاشها أهالي سيناء ضمن العمليات العسكرية والحرب على الإرهاب، تضررت فيها العديد من مباني المدارس، كما توقفت العملية التعليمية لفترات مطولة خلالها. وتأكيدا على أهمية الالتزام بتطبيق المادة 19 من الدستور المصري بأن "التعليم إلزامي حتى نهاية المرحلة الثانوية أو ما يعادلها... وتلتزم الدولة بتخصيص نسبة من الإنفاق الحكومي للتعليم، لا تقل عن 4% من الناتج القومي الإجمالي". ومع الأخذ في الاعتبار إعلان السيد الرئيس عبد الفتاح السيسي عام 2022 عام المجتمع المدني.

وعلى ذلك

أكتب إليكم باسم مؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان، لطلب مشاركتنا بإجابات على أسئلة تخص مجموعة من البحوث نجريها حول الحق في التعليم في شمال سيناء، راجين أن تمتد بيننا مساحة من التعاون المثمر. مؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان هي مؤسسة حقوقية مقرها لندن، تعنى بحقوق الإنسان في القطر المصري بشكل عام، وفي شبه جزيرة سيناء بشكل خاص، حيث تعمل على رصد الانتهاكات والتنويه بالإيجابيات وسبل إيجاد الحلول والعمل على رصد مطالب ومظالم وتطلعات أبناء سيناء.

كما أكتب لسيداتكم بصفتمكم كأعلى مسؤول ضمن السلطة التنفيذية في مصر مخول له الإدارة والتخطيط والمتابعة على أداء الأجهزة التنفيذية المعنية بقطاع التعليم في الدولة، وفيما يلي الأسئلة التي نود النقاش حولها مع حضراتكم كما تسنى لديكم إجابة أو إطلاع:

- 1- حصر بعدد الأبنية التعليمية في شمال سيناء في بداية العام الدراسي 2013 وتبيان أنواعها (ابتدائية، إعدادية، ثانوية) وتوزيعها الجغرافي بين رفح والشيخ زويد والعريش وباقي مدن المحافظة. ماهي القدرة الاستيعابية لتلك المدارس وماذا كان العدد الفعلي للطلاب والطالبات فيها بحلول 2013؟
- 2- كم عدد المعلمين والمعلمات في تلك المدارس وكم يبلغ العجز في العدد إن كان هناك عجز، بحلول 2013؟
- 3- حصر بمدى تضرر المباني التعليمية آنفة الذكر في المحافظة من جراء العمليات العسكرية خلال كل سنة منذ 2014 وحتى 2021، وماهي الأبنية التعليمية التي بقيت قادرة على استيعاب الطلاب والمدرسين خلال تلك الفترة. كم إجمالا عدد الأبنية التعليمية التي يمكن اعتبارها "خارج الخدمة" بحلول عام 2021؟
- 4- كيف أثرت هجمات تنظيم داعش على العملية التعليمية؟ وكيف أثرت العمليات العسكرية للجيش والشرطة؟
- 5- ما هو مدى التقدم في ترميم بعض تلك المباني المتضررة، وإن كان هناك خطة للانتهاء من ترميم جميع المباني، ما هي خطط الحكومة بخصوص إنشاء مباني تعليمية جديدة من حيث العدد والنوع والتوزيع الجغرافي؟ برجاء إفادتنا بتوزيع ونوع ال 22 مدرسة المذكورة في تصريحات المحافظ؟



- 6- خلال السنوات 2013-2022 ماذا كانت خطط الحكومة والسلطات المحلية لاستيعاب الطلاب والطالبات الذين تهدمت مدارسهم؟ برجاء ذكر الأعداد وأسماء المدارس التي تم نقل تلك الطلاب إليها وما وفرته الدولة من سبل لتمكينهم من استكمال العملية التعليمية، وإن لم يحدث ذلك فلماذا وماذا كانت المعوقات؟
- 7- برجاء شرح ما توفر للطلاب من مسارات تعليم غير رسمية ومدى مساهمة الدولة في ذلك.
- 8- فيما يتعلق بالأبنية التعليمية المتضررة، نرجو من سيادتكم التوضيح هل كان التضرر كاملاً أدى لتوقف الدراسة لمدة معينة في تلك الأبنية؟ وهل يستمر توقف الدراسة فيها إلى الآن؟ أم كان التضرر جزئياً، وهل تم معالجة آثار هذه الاعتداءات؟ وكم تكلفت؟ ومن أين تم الإنفاق عليها؟ هل هي ميزانيات تم تخصيصها لهذا الصدد؟ أم من الميزانية العادية ضمن إدارة التربية والتعليم بمحافظة شمال سيناء؟
- 9- إذا كانت لجنة التعليم لم تطرح تلك الأسئلة على الحكومة في أي جلسات أو إجراءات داخل مجلس النواب، لماذا؟ وهل تنتوي اللجنة طرحها؟ وماهي القضايا التي تخص الحق في التعليم الذي تطرقت له اللجنة خلال التشكيل الحالي والتشكيل السابق لمجلسي النواب؟
- 10- تظهر بحوثنا الأولية قيام قوات الجيش المصري بنشر كمائن بالقرب من مدارس ومنشآت تعليمية، وفي تلك الحالات هل كان الغرض من ذلك تأمين تلك المنشآت بطلب من سيادتكم؟ أم أنه كان بغرض عسكري بحث ضمن عمليات الحرب على الإرهاب في المحافظة؟ وهل كان يمكن تفادي تلك الضرورة من نشر كمائن عسكرية داخل بعض المنشآت التعليمية أو بجوارها، وهو ما قد يجعلها عرضة لاستهداف المسلحين لها، وتبادل قوات الجيش إطلاق النار معها، بما يزيد من الخطر على أبنائنا الطلبة، والمدرسين وكافة أعضاء المنظومة التعليمية؟
- 11- ومع تداول بعض المواقع الإخبارية أنباء في سنوات سابقة على شاكلة إيقاف عناصر مسلحة لأتوبيس كان يقل معلمات من العريش إلى مدينة رفح، ومطالبتهم بضرورة الالتزام بملابس معينة. كيف كان رد فعل الإدارة التعليمية على مثل هذه الحوادث؟ وما هي الإجراءات أو الخطط التي اتبعتها السلطات لتأمين عناصر العملية التعليمية في المحافظة من طلاب ومعلمين خلال سنوات العمليات العسكرية؟ وعلى وجه الخصوص هل أثرت تلك العمليات انخراط الطالبات والمعلمات في شمال سيناء ضمن العملية التعليمية، فعلى سبيل المثال هل قلت نسبة تسجيل الطالبات في المدارس؟ أو هل اختلفت نسبة النساء ضمن المنظومة التعليمية في الإدارة التعليمية بشمال سيناء من مدرسات ووكيلات وناظرات وغيرها من الوظائف بالإدارة؟

سنكون في غاية الامتنان لأي وقت تخصصوه للإجابة على هذه الأسئلة، ستساهم أجوبتكم لا شك في توضيح الرؤية، وصياغة رد رسمي يتيح مزيد من الشفافية والمعلومات، كما يمكننا كمؤسسة مجتمع مدني من المساهمة بشكل أعمق في صياغة المقترحات ورصد الواقع بدقة ومصداقية والمساهمة في الحفاظ على حقوق المواطن السيناوي من شتى الجوانب.

نرجو شاكرين إرسال ردودكم المكتوبة عبر الايميل أو الفاكس في موعد أقصاه 15 فبراير 2023، وسنكون جاهزين للرد على أي استفسارات لديكم كتابة أو في لقاء عبر الإنترنت.

وتفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام والتقدير،

مقدمة إلى سيادتكم

Email: [Mohamed@sinaifhr.org](mailto:Mohamed@sinaifhr.org)

المدير التنفيذي لمؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان

Fax: +4402038089677

د. أحمد سالم





## Appendix 2: Letter on child recruitment, copy to the Minister of Defense and the President of the National Council for Human Rights.



مؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان  
لندن، المملكة المتحدة

<https://sinaihr.org/> - [info@sinaihr.org](mailto:info@sinaihr.org)  
فاكس: +44 0203 8089677

السيد المحترم وزير الدفاع المصري  
السيدة المحترمة رئيسة المجلس القومي لحقوق الإنسان  
٤ يوليو ٢٠٢٣

تحية طيبة وبعد،

يسعد مؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان أن تتواصل مع سيادتكم متمنية لكم تمام السداد والتوفيق. ونأمل في تعاونكم المقدر، في إطار نهج الحكومة المصرية الساعي لمد جسور التواصل مع منظمات المجتمع المدني، في توضيح عدد من الاستفسارات التي تنامت إلى علمنا من خلال جمعنا شهادات لعدد من سكان شمال سيناء حول ظاهرة تجنيد الأطفال ضمن مليشيات قبلية على خلفية العمليات العسكرية ضد الجماعات التكفيرية منذ عام ٢٠١٣.

١- يحدد القانون الوطني المصري سن 18 عامًا كحد أدنى للتجنيد الإجباري في القوات المسلحة. التزاماً بالمادة 3 (2) من البروتوكول الاختياري لاتفاقية حقوق الطفل بشأن اشتراك الأطفال في النزاعات المسلحة، والذي صادقت عليه مصر عام 2002، أصدرت الدولة في 6 فبراير 2007 إعلاناً ينص على أن الحد الأدنى لسن التجنيد الطوعي هو 16 عامًا، لكن القوات المسلحة المصرية خالفت هذا الإعلان وظلت تعلن رسميًا في الأعوام 2017 و2020 و2021 و2023 أن الحد الأدنى لسن التجنيد الطوعي هو 15 عامًا. نرجو من سيادتكم التوضيح.

٢- حصلت المؤسسة على أدلة تشير إلى قيام السلطات المصرية في معسكري الساحة والزهور بمدني رفح والشيخ زويد، بشكل غير رسمي، بتجنيد ثلاثة أطفال دون سن 15 عامًا، للقيام بأعمال مراقبة ضد عناصر متطرفة وتوصيل مواد لوجستية إلى ارتكازات عسكرية في أماكن خطيرة، مما أدى إلى مقتل هؤلاء الأطفال على يد التنظيم الإرهابي. الأمر الذي يتعارض بشكل واضح مع البروتوكولين الأول والثاني الإضافيين لعام 1977 والملحقين لاتفاقيات جنيف 1949. نرجو من سيادتكم التوضيح.

٣- وفقا لعدد من شهادات أقارب أطفال مجندين وأدلة دامغة حصلت عليها المؤسسة عن تجنيد تسعة أطفال دون سن 18 من قبل المجموعات القبلية الموالية للحكومة، والتي تعمل تحت إشراف الجيش المصري. شارك بعض هؤلاء الأطفال بشكل مباشر مع القوات المشتركة المكونة من القوات المسلحة المصرية والمليشيات الموالية للحكومة في الأعمال العدائية ضد الجماعات المتطرفة، والتي قُتل خلالها أحد الأطفال وأصيب آخرين. ظهر هؤلاء الأطفال وهم مسلحين يعتلون ظهر دبابات عسكرية في وجود أفراد تابعين للجيش المصري، تشير الأدلة التي اطلعت عليها المؤسسة إلى أن السلطات المصرية كانت على الأرجح على علم بتجنيد هؤلاء الأطفال في جماعة مسلحة وهم دون 18 عامًا، لكنها لم تمنع هذا التجنيد أو تتخذ أي إجراءات لضمان تسريحهم، في انتهاك للمادة 4 بموجب البروتوكول الاختياري لاتفاقية حقوق الطفل بشأن اشتراك الأطفال في النزاعات المسلحة. نرجو من سيادتكم التوضيح.

٤- رغم إعلان رئيس الجمهورية في أكثر من مناسبة عن نجاح أجهزة الدولة في القضاء على الإرهاب، اطلعت المؤسسة على أدلة قاطعة حول استخدام قوات الجيش والشرطة عدد من المدارس كارتكازات عسكرية مثل مدرسة العكور الإعدادية ومدرسة أحمد أبو سلمة في الشيخ زويد، ومدرسة المهدي الابتدائية في رفح، وكذلك عدد من المدارس في مدينة بئر العبد، رغم عودة المدنيين لهذه المناطق وحاجة الأطفال الماسة للتواجد بشكل طبيعي في مدارسهم وفي ضوء استقرار الأوضاع الأمنية. كما لاحظت مؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان أن معدل إعادة بناء المدارس المدمرة نتيجة العمليات العسكرية لا يوحى بأن قطاع التعليم على قمة سلم أولويات الحكومة رغم أهميته لاستقرار المجتمعات المحلية العائدة بعد سنوات من النزوح. نرجو توضيح الإجراءات المتخذة أو المزمع اتخاذها بهذا الشأن الهام.

وختاماً تفضلوا بقبول وافر الاحترام والتقدير،

د. أحمد سالم  
المدير التنفيذي لمؤسسة سيناء لحقوق الإنسان







**Appendix 4:** A copy of a leaked official document issued by the Office of the Minister of Education classified as an “important and urgent” letter stipulating the prohibition of collecting and circulating any detailed data about the educational process in Egypt.

١٥٥١  
التاريخ / ١ / ٢٠١٧

ط ٢٣٧٤١

النظم  
الاحصاء  
مركز المعلومات  
دكتور/ محمد  
البرزاني

السيد الأستاذ/ مدير مديرية التربية والتعليم بمحافظة البحر

جمهورية مصر العربية  
وزارة التربية والتعليم  
مكتب الوزير

تحية طيبة، وبعد:

بناءً على التعليمات الصادرة بشأن البيانات التفصيلية للمعلمين فإنه يتم الإلتزام بالآتي:

- لا يجوز تداول البيانات التفصيلية للمعلمين بالمديريات؛ لما يشكل ذلك من خطورة على الأمن القومي.
- يحظر تجميع أية بيانات تفصيلية عن العملية التعليمية (معلمين - طلبة - مدارس) بأي شكل من الأشكال على مستوى الجمهورية، ومن يخالف ذلك يتعرض للمساءلة القانونية.
- ضرورة التواصل مع الإدارة العامة لنظم المعلومات ودعم اتخاذ القرار، مع السادة مديري إدارات وأقسام الإحصاء بالمديريات والإدارات التعليمية لمعرفة البيانات الإحصائية المطلوبة عن المعلمين، والرد على طلبات واحتياجات الجهات المختلفة من المديريات التعليمية.

وتفضلوا بقبول وافر الاحترام ...

رئيس قطاع مكتب الوزير

(لواء/ حسام نبيل)

Scanned by CamScanner





**Appendix 5:** A copy of a leaked official document issued by the Educational Administration in North Sinai showing the number of schools that stopped operating in Sheikh Zuweid in 2016, due to their destruction or military use.

أسماء المباني المدرسية التي توقفت عن العمل حتي تاريخه ويتم وقف الخدمات عنها من ( كهرباء )

م	اسم المدرسة	ملاحظات
١	الشدايده الابتدائية	مغلقة امنيا
٢	عمار بن ياسر الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر بالكامل حتي الارض
٣	احمد ابوسلمة تعليم اساسي	مغلقة امنيا
٤	العبيدات تعليم اساسي	مغلقة امنيا
٥	الكوزة تعليم اساسي	مغلقة امنيا
٦	الصلاح تعليم اساسي	مغلقة امنيا
٧	التومة تعليم اساسي	المبنى مدمر ومغلق
٨	الزوارعة تعليم اساسي	المبنى مدمر بالكامل حتي الارض
٩	الوحشي تعليم اساسي	مغلقة امنيا
١٠	الثغيات تعليم اساسي	المبنى مدمر ومغلق
١١	كرم القواديس الابتدائية	مغلقة امنيا
١٢	القويعات الابتدائية	مغلقة امنيا
١٣	الزوارعة للفصل الواحد	تم إغلاق المدرسة لعدم وجو طلبة
١٤	القرية الابتدائية	تم إغلاق المدرسة لعدم وجو طلبة
١٥	القرية الإعدادية	تم إغلاق المدرسة لعدم وجو طلبة
١٦	القرية فصل واحد	تم إغلاق المدرسة لعدم وجو طلبة
١٧	العوايضة الإعدادية	المبنى مدمر بالكامل حتي الارض
١٨	الشيخ زويد ع بنات	مغلقة امنيا
١٩	الشيخ زويد الابتدائية	مغلقة امنيا
٢٠	العوايضة الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر ومغلق
٢١	أبو طويلة الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر ومغلق
٢٢	ابورفاعي الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر و مغلق امنيا
٢٣	الشلاق الابتدائية	مغلقة امنيا
٢٤	المقاطعة الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر و مغلق
٢٥	المقاطعة الإعدادية	المبنى مدمر ومغلق
٢٦	الدرأوشة الابتدائية	المبنى تم إزالة
٢٧	الخنساء ع بنات	عداد المياه والكهرباء مدمر بالكامل
٢٨	خالد ابن الوليد الابتدائية	المبنى مدمر ومغلق

وتفضلوا سيادتكم بقبول فائق الاحترام،،،،،

المختص  
رئيس القسم  
مدير عام الإدارة

احمد صابر  
علي عودة احمد  
أ/ حسن حسين سلامة





**Appendix 6:** An official statement issued by the Rafah Educational Administration in the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year, explaining the transfer of the examination committees of 17 Elementary Education Schools from city of Rafah to three committees in the schools of the city of Al-Arish and another committee in the city of Sheikh Zuweid.

محافظة شمال سيناء  
مديرية التربية والتعليم  
ادارة رفح التعليمية

**مقر لجان اتمام الشهادة الاعدادية برفح**

توزيع مقر لجان المدارس الاعدادية للصف الثالث الاعدادي بإدارة رفح التعليمية  
والتي سيؤدي الطلاب امتحانات اتمام الشهادة الاعدادية امامها للفصل الدراسي الاول ٢٠٢١ / ٢٠٢٢

م	لجنة الشهيد عبدالخالق حسين (بنات)	لجنة الشهيد عمر الاحامدة (بنين)	لجنة الشهيد الخبير عبد سلامة (بنين)
1	رفح للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	رفح للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	قوز غانم للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)
2	طارق بن زياد للتعليم للاساسي (بنات)	طارق بن زياد للتعليم للاساسي (بنين)	الرسم للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)
3	الفاروق عمر للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	الفاروق عمر للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)	المطلة الاعدادية المشتركة (بنين)
4	الامام على الاعدادية (بنات)	الامام على الاعدادية (بنين)	الوفاق الاعدادية المشتركة (بنين)
5	الطايرة للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	الطايرة للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)	ابو شنار الاعدادية (بنين)
6	الحرية للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	الحرية للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)	—
7	حق الحصان للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	حق الحصان للتعليم الاساسي (بنين)	—
8	ابو حلو الاعدادية المشتركة (بنات)	ابو حلو الاعدادية المشتركة (بنين)	—
9	عباس العقاد الاعدادية (بنات)	عباس العقاد الاعدادية (بنين)	—
10	قوز ابو رعد الاعدادية (بنات)	قوز ابو رعد الاعدادية (بنين)	—
11	نجع شيبانة الاعدادية (بنات)	نجع شيبانة الاعدادية (بنين)	—
12	المهدية الاعدادية المشتركة (بنات)	المهدية الاعدادية المشتركة (بنين)	—
13	قوز غانم للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	—	—
14	الرسم للتعليم الاساسي (بنات)	—	—
15	المطلة الاعدادية المشتركة (بنات)	—	—
16	الوفاق الاعدادية المشتركة (بنات)	—	—
17	ابو شنار الاعدادية (بنات)	—	—

ملحوظة : طلاب رفح المقيمين بمدينة بالشيخ زويد  
سيؤدون الامتحان بلجنة الشهيد النقيب محمود صلاح فارس للتعليم الاساسي بالشيخ زويد

مدير عام الادارة

وكيل الادارة

رئيس قسم التعليم الاعدادي