



Global Coalition to **Protect Education from Attack**

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Attacking Education a War Tactic Globally, Study Shows Colombia and Mexico Highly Impacted

(New York, February 27, 2014) – Schools and universities, as well as students, teachers and academics are intentionally targeted for attack in conflicts and situations of serious violence worldwide, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack said in a 250 page study released today. *Education Under Attack 2014* identifies 30 countries (see [map](#)) where there was a pattern of deliberate attacks between 2009 and 2013, including two in the Americas: Colombia and Mexico.

“Education facilities, students and staff are not just caught in the crossfire but are all too often the targets of attacks,” said Diya Nijhowne, director of the Global Coalition. “They are bombed, burned, shot, threatened and abducted precisely because of their connection to education. They are soft, easy targets, and states and armed groups need to protect them from being used as a tactic of war.”

Irregular armed groups, criminal organizations, and national military and security forces are attacking education to advance their own interests, the Global Coalition said. They may be retaliating against a community’s perceived support for the opposition; seeking to demonstrate a lack of government control by harming schools and teachers, symbols of the state; attacking forces based in or using a school building; or opposing the spread of ideas deemed to be objectionable, such as the education of girls.

“Attacks on education in the last five years have killed hundreds of students, teachers, and academics and injured many more,” Nijhowne said. “Hundreds of thousands of students have been denied the right to an education when their schools and universities have been intentionally damaged or destroyed or used for military purposes.” Colombia, for example, is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be an educator. Between 2009 and 2012, 140 Colombian teachers were murdered and more than 1,000 received death threats, according to government figures. In Colombia’s long-running internal armed conflict, some teachers in remote areas where schools are the only visible presence of the state are accused by illegal armed groups of collaborating with the enemy.

In Mexico, attacks on education took place in the context of high levels of general violence. Kidnapping and extortion are common crimes—in many cases carried out by organized crime groups, sometimes in collusion with government security forces—and teachers were frequently targeted because of their regular salary. In early December 2010, for example, gunmen set fire to a kindergarten in Ciudad Juárez when teachers refused to pay extortion fees. In September 2011, roughly 30,000 students in Acapulco were shut out of school when their teachers left the classroom to protest demands from criminal groups to hand over half their pay and a portion of their Christmas bonuses. The

previous month, five human heads were left outside an Acapulco primary school along with threatening messages.

In 25 of the 30 countries profiled in the study, including Colombia (see [map](#)), warring parties took over schools in whole or part. They used them for a variety of purposes, depending on the country, including as bases, barracks, firing positions, weapons caches, detention centers and even torture chambers. Buildings that should have been safe spaces for learning became actual battlefields when military use made them a target for attack.

In Colombia, 75 cases were recorded of schools being occupied by different armed actors from 2009 through 2012. Colombia is one of the few nations that explicitly prohibits military use of schools; however, there continued to be reports of public security forces using schools during the reporting period.

The Global Coalition also examined assaults on higher education, which have been monitored less than attacks on elementary and secondary schools. Colleges, universities and individual students and academics were attacked in 28 of the 30 profiled countries (see [map](#)), including Colombia and Mexico.

For example, in November 2013, 11 University of Córdoba students were threatened with death and accused of being left-wing guerrillas in a flyer signed by the “Rastrojos,” which is the name of a paramilitary successor group in Colombia. A few months earlier, in June, 15 masked men reportedly stormed the University of Antioquia in Colombia, cleared students and professors out of science laboratories, manufactured explosives there, and raised the flag of the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group in the university plaza.

Worldwide between 2009 and 2012, the Global Coalition found, students and educators were most at risk in 13 countries around the world. In *heavily affected* countries such as Mexico, there were reports of at least 500 attacks on schools, universities, staff and students, or at least 500 education-related victims or education buildings used for military purposes. In *very heavily affected* countries, such as Colombia, there were 1000 or more attacks or victims.

In compiling the data, the Global Coalition relied mainly on information provided by the United Nations, respected human rights groups and the media. The Global Coalition also interviewed country experts and commissioned some research locally. *Education Under Attack 2014*, follows two reports by UNESCO, in 2007 and 2010.

The Global Coalition also explored ways of protecting education. These include: investigating attacks and prosecuting perpetrators, negotiating with belligerent parties to respect schools as safe zones, ending the use of schools and teachers for electoral tasks; ensuring equitable access of different identity groups to education; and improving curricula to address perceptions that education is biased and to build respect for diversity.

In particular, the Global Coalition called for widespread adoption of the [Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#). The Guidelines draw on international human rights and humanitarian law as well as good practice to preserve education as a sanctuary in conflict.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) is a coalition of organizations that include: the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), Human Rights Watch, the Institute of International Education, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, Save the Children, the Scholars at Risk Network, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNICEF. GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

The following materials are available at:

<http://www.protectingeducation.org/user/login?destination=secure/education-under-attack-2014>

Login information:

Username: GCPEA Secure

Password: Pr3v1ew8a#

- “Education Under Attack” [video]
- Maps of Education Under Attack
- Key Facts and Findings from the Study
- Frequently Asked Questions about the Study
- *A Summary of Education Under Attack 2014*

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