



Second International Conference on Safe Schools
28 to 29 March 2017
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Chair's summary¹

The Second International Conference on Safe Schools took place from 28 to 29 March 2017 in Buenos Aires. The Conference was organized by the Government of Argentina with the support of the Government of Norway. The conference reviewed states' efforts to protect education from attack, taking stock of the implementation of the commitments contained in the *Safe Schools Declaration* which include continuing education during armed conflict and using the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use*. It contributed to a deeper understanding of the need for greater protection of children, students, teachers and educational facilities during armed conflict and provided an occasion for participants to share examples of good practice at national and international levels, and to discuss opportunities for future cooperation in the implementation of the Declaration.

Delegations from 80 States, the United Nations system, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), other civil society organizations, and academic institutions, participated in the Conference.

The Second International Conference on Safe Schools built upon the outcomes of the Oslo international Conference on Safe Schools, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway in May 2015, where the *Safe Schools Declaration* was first opened for endorsement by states.

In the lead-up to the Conference, Slovakia, France, Canada, Armenia, and Malta endorsed the *Declaration*. Belgium announced its endorsement at the

¹ This document is presented under the responsibility of the President of the Conference. It draws on the comments advanced during the discussions, and summarizes the main ideas and conclusions. It is not intended to be exhaustive nor does it constitute a negotiated outcome.

Conference, becoming the 62nd State to join the *Declaration*.² Participants highlighted that the initiative concerns all states committed to the protection of education, whether they are directly affected by armed conflict or not. States that have not yet endorsed were encouraged to do so.

Opening remarks were made by the Vice Minister of Defense of the Argentine Republic, Mr. Ángel Tello, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Argentine Republic, Ambassador Pedro Villagra Delgado, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Ms. Laila Bokhari, and the President and CEO of Save the Children Canada, Ms. Patricia Erb.

Participants at the conference expressed deep concern over continued attacks on, and military use of, educational facilities, which put children, students, and teachers at risk of harm and disrupt the provision of education in armed conflict. States reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen the protection of education from attack to enable the safe continued education of children and youth, no matter where in the world they live, and to protect educational facilities from military use.

Key conclusions from the substantive sessions included the following:

- **Preventing attacks on education**

Panelists referred to evidence that demonstrates that attacks on schools have occurred in at least 21 countries since 2013.³ These attacks, too often deliberately targeted, include the bombing, burning and destruction of educational facilities, and result in horrific consequences, such as the death and injury of children, students and teachers; the risk of abduction, violence and abuse; the disruption of learning opportunities and the deprivation of access to schools for fear of being attacked. Furthermore, experiences from affected countries show that attacks often force schools to close, and those that continue to operate, do so at risk of impaired teaching, with girls being particularly affected.

² States that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration as of 29 March 2017: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Malta, Montenegro, Mozambique, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Palestine, Panama, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, and Zambia.

³ Statistic provided by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

- **Protecting schools and universities from military use**

The use of schools by armed actors exposes children to the risk of interrupted education, recruitment, trafficking, sexual violence, and attack by opposing parties. This practice presents a major impediment in efforts to make schools safe for all. Evidence was shown of continued military use of educational facilities documented in 24 states in all regions of the world since 2013.⁴ Since the *Declaration* was opened for endorsement in Oslo, an increasing number of states have incorporated the guidelines not only into domestic policy, but also into military training and frameworks for national and international operations. Representatives from the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations highlighted their prohibition on the military use of schools and shared examples of their efforts to vacate schools occupied by armed groups.

A toolkit to assist in the understanding and the implementation of the *Guidelines*, comprising practical tools and guidance for militaries and non-state armed groups to protect educational facilities from attack and military use, was launched at the Conference.

- **Working with non-state armed actors for the protection of the education from attack**

Panelists referred to the importance of working with non-state armed actors and signaled how the *Declaration* serves as a tool for raising awareness. Although there are significant challenges in this area, both the *Declaration* and the *Guidelines* can and indeed are used as a tool to increase respect for schools as zones of peace, also by non-state armed actors.

- **Monitoring and reporting on attacks on education**

Reliable and relevant data on attacks on educational facilities, victims of attacks, and military use of schools and universities during armed conflict was highlighted as necessary in order to mount an effective humanitarian response and provide assistance to victims of attacks on education. Examples of tools to collect, analyze and disseminate data, such as the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, national education clusters and the GCPEA-led Education Under Attack reports, were presented. Participants further underscored the role of national armed forces and UN peacekeeping missions

⁴ Statistic provided by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

⁵ Implementing the Guidelines: A toolkit to guide understanding and implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict (2017), Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack in partnership with the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative:

<http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/toolkit.pdf>

in collecting and ensuring access to accurate and reliable information on attacks on education.

- **Seeking accountability for attacks on education**

Holding government armed forces and non-state armed groups accountable for attacking schools is essential in deterring attacks on education and military use of schools. Using existing mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and the International Humanitarian Fact Finding Commission, to investigate allegations of violations, identify and prosecute perpetrators, is essential for justice and reconciliation, and to prevent future unlawful attacks. The *Declaration* and the *Guidelines* are useful tools to promote compliance with applicable international and national legal frameworks, whose effectiveness is crucial for achieving accountability.

- **Conflict-sensitive education policy, and continuing education during armed conflict**

Disruption to schooling severely impacts children's education, future opportunities, and psychological well-being. The closure of educational facilities, even for a limited period of time, has a severe and long-lasting impact on learning and prevents children from returning to education, impacting entire generations in some situations. Continuing education in a safe place during armed conflict is essential to provide quality learning opportunities, and a sense of normality, safety, and routine for children experiencing armed conflict whilst building foundations for peace among future generations. Failure to do so not only impacts individual students, it affects families, communities and sometimes entire regions. Ensuring a rapid return to education is critical, including undertaking provisional measures such as building temporary structures, providing language and culturally appropriate learning materials and teacher training. Measures must be undertaken to ensure safe access to schools, including ensuring that school grounds are free from weapons and explosive remnants of war, that routes to schools are safe, and that buildings are adequately reinforced and protected to ensure they are safe places for learning.

- **Cooperation and international assistance to support the prevention of attacks against education**

The *Safe Schools Declaration* is a point of convergence, exchange, and collaboration amongst States, international organizations and civil society actors that seek to share a common commitment to the protection of

education during armed conflict. The *Declaration* creates a community of practice and a forum for mobilization of funds and political will.

In light of the commitment to meet on a regular basis to review the implementation of the *Declaration* and to promote its universalization, the Chair invites endorsing States to consider hosting a third Conference on Safe Schools.