



Global Coalition to **Protect Education from Attack**

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) was established in 2010 by organizations from the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected fragile states, higher education, protection, international human rights, and international humanitarian law who were concerned about on-going attacks on education institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity. GCPEA is governed by a steering committee that includes the following international organizations: Council for At-Risk Academics, Human Rights Watch, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR. GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.¹

GCPEA writes in advance of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's upcoming pre-sessional working group of Mexico to highlight areas of concern regarding attacks on education during the reporting period 2006-2011 and beyond. GCPEA defines attacks on education as threats or deliberate use of force against students, teachers, academics, education trade union members and government officials, education aid workers, and other education staff, and against schools, universities and other education institutions carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic or religious reasons. Such acts undermine the conditions necessary for the protection of the rights of children, including their right to life, health, and to a quality education. GCPEA hopes this submission will inform your consideration of Mexico's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Introduction

According to *Education under Attack 2014*, "In Mexico, attacks on teachers, academics and students took place in the context of high levels of general violence, including the abduction without trace of large numbers of children and adults.² Heavily armed criminal groups have fought over territory and control of the drug trade -the main source of heroin and cocaine entering the United States – and against security forces trying to dismantle them...³ According to government sources, more than 70,000 people were killed in drug-related violence from December 2006 to December 2012, and more than 26,000 were

¹ This submission was prepared by the GCPEA Secretariat, based on information collected by the Secretariat and the Coalition's member organizations, particularly UNESCO's publication *Education under Attack 2010*, and GCPEA's publication, *Education under Attack 2014*. **This submission is, however, independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations.**

² Informe sobre la situación de derechos humanos en Jalisco, 2012, 109-112.

³ International Crisis Group (ICG), Peña Nieto's Challenge: Criminal Cartels and Rule of Law in Mexico, Latin America Report no 48 (ICG, 19 March 2013); HRW, World Report 2012: Mexico (New York: HRW, 2012); Paris Martinez, "Mapping the presence of Mexican cartels in Central America," In *Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas*, 2 July 2013; National Security Student Policy Group, *The War on Mexican Cartels: Options for US and Mexican Policy-makers* (Cambridge, MA: Institute of Politics - Harvard University, September 2012); and Brandon Darby, "Mexican officer: military at war with cartels in Nuevo Laredo," 9 March 2013, Breitbart.com.

victims of disappearances or otherwise went missing.⁴ Teachers were among a long list of targets, reportedly because of their regular salary.⁵ Parents and children were attacked at schools and police were targeted while trying to protect educational establishments. “

Attacks on School Buildings

According to *Education under Attack 2014*, “During 2009-2012, there was evidence of three direct attacks on school buildings plus additional threats against schools.

In early December 2010, gunmen set fire to a kindergarten in Ciudad Juárez on the northern border because teachers refused to pay extortion fees,⁶ and in September 2011, threats of grenade attacks on schools in Santiago, in the north-eastern state of Nuevo León, caused panic among parents.⁷

Additionally, in July 2012, a kindergarten and a primary school were destroyed in Turicato, Michoacán state, by a Catholic sect called the Followers of the Virgin of the Rosary. Members used sledgehammers and pick-axes to destroy six classrooms, six bathrooms, furniture and computers and then burned down the buildings after a leader claimed she had received an order from the Virgin Mary to destroy them. The sect, whose rules prohibit formal schooling, refused to accept the secular government curriculum, especially on science and sexuality, or government uniforms, preferring robes and a headscarf.”⁸

Attacks on School Students, Teachers, and Other Education Personnel

According to *Education under Attack 2010*, “Teachers at six schools in Juarez, in the northern state of Durango, were threatened by members of a drug cartel. In a series of written warnings posted on school walls from 12 November 2008, armed drug gangs threatened to kidnap students if the teachers failed to pay Christmas bonuses to the traffickers. Several of the schools evacuated all of their students and closed for three or more weeks. On 17 March 2009, in Triqui Region, San Miguel Copola, in the state of Guerrero, more than 20 high-calibre cartridges were found on the campus of Oaxaca’s 83rd Baccalaureate Studies Institute following a raid by armed gangs on a community along its perimeter. Continuing armed attacks attributed to the Union of Social Welfare of the Triqui Region (UBISORT), a paramilitary group, forced primary and secondary high schools to suspend classes during April 2009.”⁹

⁴ Lauren Villagran, “Mexico tunes in to needs of drug war survivors,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 August 2012; ICG, Peña Nieto’s Challenge: Criminal Cartels and Rule of Law in Mexico, Latin American Report no 48 (ICG, 19 March 2013); Francisco Reséndez, “Lista oficial de desaparecidos es de 26 mil 121: Segob,” *El Universal*, 26 February 2013; and HRW, Mexico’s disappeared: The enduring cost of a crisis ignored (New York: HRW, February 2013), 3.

⁵ Elisabeth Malkin, “As Gangs Move In on Mexico’s Schools, Teachers Say ‘Enough’,” *New York Times*, 25 September 2011.

⁶ “Attackers set kindergarten ablaze in Mexican border city,” *CNN*, 7 December 2010; and Cindy Casares, “Juárez Kindergarten Burned for Refusing to Pay Criminals,” 6 December 2010.

⁷ Agence France-Presse, “Fears of violence shake Mexico schools,” *Relief Web*, 2 October 2011.

⁸ “Religious Sect Destroys Schools in Mexican Town,” *Fox News Latino*, 14 July 2012; Allison Jackson, “Mexico: Religious Sect Blocks Access to Schools,” *Global Post*, 23 August 2012; Grace Protopapas, “Mexico: Religious Cult Blocks Children’s Education,” *The Argentina Independent*, 23 August 2012; Sofia Miselem, “Mexico Police Deployed After Sect Blocks Schools,” *AFP*, 27 August 2012; and “Mexico sect says no to public education, burns the schools,” *Casa Grande Dispatch*, 1 September 2012.

⁹ Telesis News, “Niños Dejan La Escuela Por Amenaza De Secuestro En México,” December 21, 2008; *El Siglo De Torreón*, “Evacúan Escuelas Por Amenaza De Extorsión,” December 17, 2008; and Patricia Briseno, “Agresiones y Amenazas Cierran Escuelas Triquis,” *Excelsior*, April 1, 2009

According to *Education under Attack 2014*, “At least 14 school students,¹⁰ 12 school teachers¹¹ and two education officials¹² were killed in attacks on education in 2009-2012. One teacher who was a leading teacher trade unionist was abducted and his whereabouts remain unknown.¹³ Several school students were also abducted.¹⁴

Armed criminal groups in many cases demanded that teachers pay them a proportion of their salary or face kidnapping or other violence. But there were also killings of students and teachers by gunmen whose affiliation and motive were unexplained.

In Ciudad Juárez, in November 2010, there were both threats against individual teachers and threats posted on school walls warning that students would be kidnapped if teachers failed to hand over money to the perpetrators.¹⁵ One vice-principal of a primary school said criminals ‘wrote graffiti on the school’s walls saying: “If you don’t pay up a massacre will happen”.’¹⁶ In December 2010, the Chihuahua state senate called on the Governor and President to adopt a security plan to protect educational institutions in Ciudad Juárez from extortion.¹⁷

On 30 August 2011, at least 80 primary schools in Acapulco, in the south-western state of Guerrero, closed when up to 400 teachers went on strike in protest against threats of extortion and kidnapping.¹⁸ One week later, it was reported that this figure had increased to 300 schools, affecting 30,000 students in the area.¹⁹ The trigger for the strike was reportedly a blanket demand issued to primary schools

¹⁰ “Four Students Kidnapped from School and Brutally Executed in Cuernavaca,” Mexico Gulf Reporter, 9 March 2012; “4 students killed in EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK 2014 235suspected drug violence in Mexico,” Press TV, 10 March 2012; Tracey Wilkinson and Cecilia Sanchez, “10 youths slain in Mexico,” Los Angeles Times, 30 March 2010; Anahi Rama, “Hitmen kill 10 youths in Mexico’s drug-hit north,” Reuters, 29 March 2010; James McKinley Jr., “10 Mexican Students Killed in Another Violent Weekend,” New York Times, 29 March 2010; “Student Shot Dead in Classroom,” Herald Sun, 26 May 2011; Dave Gibson, “Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico,” Examiner, 31 August 2011; and Lydia Warren, “Is nowhere safe in Mexico? Five bodies - including those of three high school students - found buried at UNIVERSITY,” MailOnline, 16 December 2011.

¹¹ “Protests in Mexico after Oaxaca teacher killed,” Seattle Times, 28 August 2009; “Latin America: Mexico Drug War Update,” Stop the Drug War.org, 11 December 2009; “Three Teachers Killed in Mexico,” Americas News, 19 September 2011; “Three people killed in an ambush in the Mexican state of Guerrero,” Latin America Current Events, 20 September 2011; EFE, “Teacher, 2 others die in ambush in Guerrero,” Borderland Beat, 20 September 2011; “Teacher is Executed in Acapulco,” Borderland Beat, 3 January 2012; “4 Teachers in Mexico Executed Enroute to Funeral, Narcos Are Suspected,” Latino Daily News, 17 December 2012; and Octavio Velez Ascencio, “Asesinan a maestro de la sección 22 en Oaxaca,” La Jornada, 6 April 2011.

¹² “Three people killed in an ambush in the Mexican state of Guerrero,” Latin America Current Events, 20 September 2011; and EFE, “Teacher, 2 others die in ambush in Guerrero,” Borderland Beat, 20 September 2011.

¹³ Interview with Yessica Sánchez (lawyer, former President of LIMEDDH-Oaxaca), 6 August 2013; and “Disappearance: carlos René Román Salazar,” *Partners in Rights*, 28 March 2011.

¹⁴ Dave Gibson, “Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico,” Examiner, 31 August 2011; “Four Students Kidnapped from School and Brutally Executed in Cuernavaca,” Mexico Gulf Reporter, 9 March 2012; and “4 students killed in suspected drug violence in Mexico,” Press TV, 10 March 2012.

¹⁵ Edgar Roman, “Graffiti in Mexican border city threatens teachers, students,” CNN, 26 November 2010.

¹⁶ Chris Arsenault and Franc Contreras, “Mexico’s drugs war goes to school,” Al Jazeera, 2 September 2011.

¹⁷ Dictamen de la Comisión de seguridad pública a la proposición con punto de acuerdo con relación a la extorsión que sufren las escuelas públicas en Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua.

¹⁸ “Paran 400 maestros por inseguridad en Acapulco,” El Universal, 30 August 2011; and Dave Gibson, “Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico,” Examiner, 31 August 2011.

¹⁹ Ezequiel Flores Contreras, “Paro de clases por inseguridad en Acapulco afecta a 30 mil estudiantes,” Proceso, 5 September 2011.

ordering teachers to give up 50 per cent of their pay before 1 October and part of their Christmas bonus, or face the consequences. The threat was reportedly made by phone, leaflets dropped off at schools and banners posted outside them.²⁰ One teacher, who was a paymaster for teachers, received a letter requesting details of all teaching staff working in a specific area of the Acapulco education system who earned more than 8,000 pesos bi-weekly, and all of those earning more than 20,000 pesos. The letter also demanded the teachers' names, addresses and cell phone numbers, their voter registration cards and the names and addresses of their schools, plus the names of anyone who declined to divulge information.²¹ According to the online newspaper Examiner.com, the threat was confirmed by an official in Guerrero's Department of Education for the region of Acapulco-Coyuca de Benítez, and it was believed that a violent criminal group known as La Barredora had sent the message.²²

Acapulco officials argued that teachers were over-reacting.²³ However, the payroll officer at La Patria es Primero primary school, Acapulco, who was told to hand over information about teachers' salaries, fled the city.²⁴ Teachers demanded that military personnel be stationed outside schools.²⁵

The threats were made amid a climate of pervasive violence. Three weeks earlier, gunmen reportedly broke into a school and snatched a student whose body was later found in La Sabana.²⁶ At the start of term, teachers in at least 75 Acapulco schools received threats, according to a CNN report.²⁷ In September 2011, police found a sack of five decomposed men's heads dumped outside a primary school in Acapulco along with threatening messages.²⁸ Also in September, it was reported that in a three-month period 43 teachers had been 'express kidnapped', meaning they were held for a limited period but released after a payment was made.²⁹

In Acapulco, 12 schools reportedly did not reopen after the Christmas break due to the continuing demand that teachers hand over half their salaries and all of their bonuses. On 2 January 2012, the body of one murdered Acapulco teacher, Maria Viruel Andraca, 51, was left in the boot of a taxi on the Acapulco-Mexico highway with a note reportedly left by a criminal group,³⁰ sparking new protests by

²⁰ Elisabeth Malkin, "As Gangs Move In on Mexico's Schools, Teachers Say 'Enough'," New York Times, 25 September 2011; and "Paran 400 maestros por inseguridad en Acapulco," El Universal, 30 August 2011.

²¹ Dave Gibson, "Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico," Examiner, 31 August 2011; and "Paran 400 maestros por inseguridad en Acapulco," El Universal, 30 August 2011. The threat was also confirmed by a former government official to Paulina Vega for this study, 30 July 2013.

²² Dave Gibson, "Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico," Examiner, 31 August 2011.

²³ "Paran 400 maestros por inseguridad en Acapulco," El Universal, 30 August 2011; and interview with a former Government official of Guerrero, July 2013.

²⁴ Elisabeth Malkin, "As Gangs Move In on Mexico's Schools, Teachers Say 'Enough'," New York Times, 25 September 2011.

²⁵ Diario Acapulco, 12 September 2011.

²⁶ Dave Gibson, "Cartels now extorting teachers, killing schoolchildren in Mexico," Examiner, 31 August 2011.

²⁷ "La policía de Acapulco encuentra cinco cabezas humanas en una zona escolar," CNN, 28 September 2011.

²⁸ "Five severed heads left outside Mexican school," BBC News, 28 September 2011.

²⁹ Citlal Giles Sánchez, "Denuncian que al menos 43 maestros han sido secuestrados en Acapulco," La Jornada Guerrero, 14 September 2011.

³⁰ "Teacher is Executed in Acapulco," Borderland Beat, 3 January 2012; "Asesinan a profesora en Guerrero," La Jornada, 3 January, 2012, 8.

teachers on the need for security measures to be implemented.³¹ Elsewhere, gunmen attacked parents waiting for their children outside a Ciudad Juárez elementary school on 25 August 2011, wounding one man and four women.³²

Police officers assigned to protect schools and students were also killed. On 24 February 2010, a police officer, PC Marco Antonio Olague, was shot dead in front of dozens of pupils as they were going into a primary school in Chihuahua city, although the reason was unclear.³³ Separately, on 12 September 2010, three police officers deployed to provide security at schools and campuses were shot dead while parked at a primary school in Ciudad Juárez while waiting for a colleague who had gone inside. Gunmen using AK-47 rifles sprayed the patrol vehicle with bullets. When crime investigators arrived, the gunmen reportedly returned and opened fire again.³⁴ Two teachers who were trade union members were killed and one teacher who was a leading teacher trade unionist was abducted, and his whereabouts remain unknown. These incidents appeared to be linked to intra-trade union rivalries over the control of education in Oaxaca state as part of the wider struggle between those for and against more autonomy for the indigenous population....³⁵

At least six teachers were killed in 2013 for reasons that were never established.³⁶ For example, on 10 September in Acapulco, it was reported that teacher José Omar Ramírez Castro had been shot and killed less than 10 metres from his school as he went to give his class, sparking a strike by 144 teachers over insecurity and disrupting the education of over 10,000 students.³⁷ Threats of kidnap and extortion against teachers also continued, with, for example, one school in the state of Morelos responding by moving teachers from one school to another to reduce the possible targeting of specific teachers.³⁸ Police were alleged to have used excessive force and illegally detained protesters when they used electric batons to disperse 300 teachers and students demonstrating against education reforms in Veracruz in September."³⁹

³¹ Francisca Meza Carranza, "Asesinato de maestra, por omisión de pacto sobre seguridad, critican," *La Jornada Guerrero*, 12 January 2012.

³² "140 Acapulco Schools Shut Down by Kidnapping and Extortion Threats," *Fox News Latino*, 30 August 2011.

³³ "Ejecutan a policía frente a escuela en Chihuahua," *El Universal*, 24 February 2010.

³⁴ Daniel Borunda, "3 Juárez officers ambushed slain outside school, police death toll now 64," *El Paso Times*, 12 September 2010.

³⁵ AP, "School's out in Oaxaca: Teachers on strike," *The Guardian*, 2 September 2009; Interview with Yessica Sánchez (lawyer, former President of LIMEDDH-Oaxaca), 6 August 2013; "Disappearance: Carlos René Román Salazar," *Partners in Rights*, 28 March 2011; Octavio Velez Ascencio, "Asesinan a maestro de la sección 22 en Oaxaca," *La Jornada*, 6 April 2011. "Protests in Mexico after Oaxaca teacher killed," *Seattle Times*, 28 August 2009.

³⁶ "El asesinato de un maestro dejan sin clases a alumnos," *Zócalo Saltillo*, 10 September 2013; Sección 22, "Sección 22 condena el artero asesinato del profesor Everardo Hugo Hernández," 11 September 2013; Norma Trujillo Báez, "Debe aclararse desaparición y muerte de profesor: CNTE," *La Jornada Veracruz*, 30 September 2013; Pedro Tonantzin, "Maestros en Morelos sufren secuestros y extorsiones," *Excelsior*, 30 May 2013; and Isaín Mandujano, "Hallan muerto segundo maestro parista en Chiapas," *Chiapas Paralelo*, 13 October 2013.

³⁷ "El asesinato de un maestro dejan sin clases a alumnos," 10 September 2013.

³⁸ A leader of the Teachers Union SENTE at Morelos acknowledged the existence of four cases of threats and extortions. See Pedro Tonantzin, "Maestros en Morelos sufren secuestros y extorsiones," *Excelsior*, 30 May 2013; and Pedro Tonantzin, "En Morelos capacitarán a maestros ante llamadas de extorsión telefónica," *Excelsior*, 12 July 2013.

³⁹ "Sin aparecer 16 docentes tras desalojo en Xalapa," 16 September 2013; and Noé Zavaleta, "Desalojan de madrugada a maestros y estudiantes de la plaza Lerdo de Xalapa," *Proceso*, 14 September 2013.

State Responses to Attacks

According to *Education under Attack 2014*, Mexico⁴⁰ has implemented responses to attacks on schools. Safety measures, including emergency drills, have become a part of school policy in Mexico in an effort to mitigate the impact of potential attacks. For example, in response to crossfire in shootouts near to schools, teachers in a number of states were given training on how to keep their students safe during gun battles and schools began to hold drills.⁴⁰

Also according to *Education under Attack 2014*: “In response to extortion-related kidnapping threats issued to schools in Mexico, municipal authorities in 2009 dispatched hundreds of police cadets to patrol the targeted school surroundings,⁴¹ while a local government-created program in Acapulco, called ‘Safe School’, increased security personnel in and around the schools in 2011 and installed alarm buttons in school buildings.⁴²

Although an elevated risk of attack or a general security situation may warrant the use of physical protection measures in some cases, these measures can have unintended negative consequences that need to be considered carefully. The presence of guards, police or other armed personnel, when they are themselves the intended targets of violence, can put students and teachers at increased risk of attack.⁴³

GCPEA welcomes Mexico’s public statement made at the Palais de Nations in Geneva on April 2, 2014, that, “*We have no doubt on the relevance and the timeliness of the Guidelines. You may remember Mexico’s commitment to fight against the involvement of children in armed conflicts in every way. As to the guidelines themselves, we welcome the approach and we believe that the simplicity and pragmatism increase the likelihood of their widespread adoption.*” The Guidelines referred to are the *Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, the aim of which is to minimize the negative impact that armed conflict has on students.

Suggested Questions to the Government of Mexico:

- How many schools were attacked due to violence between armed groups and security forces in the reporting period and to the present day?

- What policies are in place to prevent security forces from engaging with armed groups near and around schools?

- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that attacks on students and education are properly investigated and monitored?

⁴⁰ Chris Hawley, “Mexico schools teach lessons in survival,” USA Today, 8 July 2010.

⁴¹ Information supplied by UNESCO, 22 June 2009.

⁴² Rafael Romo, “Acapulco teachers, sick of violence, march in protest,” CNN, 23 September 2011.

⁴³ GCPEA, Study on Field-based Programmatic Measures to Protect Education from Attack (New York: December 2011), 12-13.

-Has Mexico monitored the short and long-term impact of the numerous attacks by armed non-state actors on education personnel, students, and schools during the reporting period and beyond?

-What remedial and reparation measures (to education personnel, students, and the education system more generally) have been provided or put into place to address the impact of attacks by armed non-state actors?

– Beyond the use of government armed forces for security purposes, what policies are in place to ensure the safety and security of students, teachers and other personnel?

Suggested Recommendations to the Government of Mexico

– Investigate, prosecute and, if guilt is proven, punish individuals responsible for ordering, or bearing command responsibility for, or taking part in, the range of violations of international law that constitute attacks on education.

-Enact domestic legislation that protects schools and educational personnel including from threats and extortion of teachers' salaries.

– Government leaders and leaders of armed non-state groups should make clear public statements that attacks on education are prohibited and issue clear military orders to this effect.

-The Government should consider endorsing the [Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#) and incorporating them into their legislation and military doctrine and policies.