**Importance of continuing education during armed conflict**

28.5 million children – half of all children out of school globally – live in countries affected by conflict (source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report* 2013/14).

Statistics indicate that between 2008 and 2011, the percentage of out-of-school children (primary school age) in conflict-affected countries rose from 42% to 50%, even though the total number of affected countries decreased (source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report* 2013/14).

In 55 low and middle income countries where the level of educational inequality doubled, the probability of conflict more than doubled, from 3.8% to 9.5% (source: *EFA Global Monitoring Report* 2013/14).

* During armed conflict, schools provide an important link to life-saving services, such as mine-awareness, HIV prevention, feeding programs and psychosocial services. They can also act as a safe space to protect from dangers such as forced or under-age recruitment or use by armed actors; trafficking, sexual violence and exploitation.
* In conflict environments, education spaces can be an important avenue for psycho-social recovery and restoring social cohesion.

**Military use of schools and universities**

* Over the past decade, fighting forces have used schools and universities for military purposes such as bases, barracks, firing positions, armories, and detention centers in at least 26 countries experiencing armed conflict. Military use of schools happens in the majority of conflict-affected countries (Source: GCPEA).
* Under international humanitarian law, education institutions are ordinarily considered civilian objects and a deliberate attack against civilian objects is a war crime. Civilian objects can however be converted into military objectives, making them potentially lawful targets for attack by opposing forces.
* During times of armed conflict, the military use of schools and universities can compromise their civilian status, transforming places of learning into lawful military targets, potentially placing students and staff at risk of retaliatory action.
* In addition to the danger of death or injury, the presence of armed actors within education facilities also exposes children to increased risk of recruitment and use by armed actors and sexual violence. This can lead students to drop out and parents to remove their children from school in order to protect them.
* The military use of schools and universities during armed conflict, even if partial, punctual or confined to a particular area, creates a sense that places of education are not safe places anywhere in the context of armed conflict.

**The Guidelines**

* The core aim of the Guidelines is to protect education facilities, students and staff from potentially devastating consequences resulting from military use of schools and universities during armed conflict.
* Acknowledging that parties to armed conflict are invariably faced with difficult dilemmas, the Guidelines offer concrete guidance to help parties to conflict exercise restraint with respect to the military use of educational facilities in armed conflict and to mitigate the impact the practice can have on students’ safety and education when it does occur.
* The Guidelines draw on existing good practice found in national legislation, military doctrine, military trainings, jurisprudence, as well as government policies and guidance in a number of countries.
* The Guidelines are non-binding; they do not create new international obligations. By endorsing the Guidelines, parties to conflict are called upon, as far as possible and as appropriate, to implement that guidance through internal or national policies and practices and ensure appropriate practice throughout the chain of command.

**The Safe Schools Declaration**

* The Safe Schools Declaration will place the Guidelines within a broader framework of attacks on education and protection of civilians. It will offer states a basis to formally express their support for and commitment to implement the Guidelines at an international conference planned for 1 June 2015 in Oslo.
* Argentina and Norway are leading state consultations on this draft Declaration in Geneva.

**The Guidelines and armed non-state actors**

* The Guidelines concern both state and non-state parties to conflict.
* Research has found that in over a third of all countries affected by armed conflict, between 2005 and 2012, schools were used for military purposes by non-state armed groups. In the same period, schools were used by government forces in more than half of all countries affected by conflict. (Source: GCPEA)
* Non-state actors are not part of the endorsement process underway through the Safe Schools Declaration. The UN, other international organizations and civil society can play a crucial role in promoting and disseminating the Guidelines among armed non-state actors. States are called upon to support their efforts in this regard.
* State endorsement of the Guidelines, through signing the “Safe Schools Declaration” and via their practical implementation, will also contribute to establishing best practices, including among armed groups, and thereby enhance the protection of schools.