

## Safe Schools Declaration

Armed conflict, unrest and other violence continue to expose students and education personnel to harm and to limit educational opportunities for millions of people worldwide. Attacks have involved the bombing, shelling or burning of schools and universities and the murder, kidnapping, abduction or arbitrary arrest of students, teachers and academics. Education facilities have been used for military purposes - such as bases, barracks or detention centres - by armed groups and armed forces. Such actions directly impede education. In some circumstances they may increase the risk of child recruitment by armed actors, leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation, and can increase the likelihood of education institutions becoming targets for attack.

Attacks, or threats of attacks, on education, its facilities, students and personnel, can cause severe and long lasting harm to individuals and societies. People entitled to protection may be killed, injured or exposed to wider risks. The functioning of education facilities may be compromised. Access to education may be blocked entirely, or people may stay away, fearing for their safety. Attacks on schools and universities have been used to promote intolerance and exclusion – to prevent the education of girls, to perpetuate conflict between ethnic groups, to restrict cultural diversity, and to deny academic freedom or rights of association.

By contrast, education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury or exploitation; it can alleviate the psychological impact of conflict by offering routine and stability and can provide links to other vital services. Continuation of education can provide lifesaving health information as well advice on specific risks in societies facing conflict. Education that is 'conflict sensitive' avoids contributing to conflict and pursues a contribution to peace. Education is fundamental to development and to the full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms.

We recognise our responsibility to ensure that places of education are places of safety.

We commend the work of the United Nations Security Council on children and armed conflict and acknowledge the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for grave violations against children in armed conflict. We emphasise the importance of Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), which urge parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and we note that resolution 2143 encourages Governments to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and armed non-State groups.

We welcome the development of the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict*. Though not in itself a legally binding document, and not affecting existing obligations under international law, this set of guidelines draws on existing good practice and aims to provide guidance that will further minimise the impact of war on civilians. We welcome

all efforts to disseminate these guidelines and to promote their implementation among States forces, armed non-State actors and civil society organizations.

We stress the importance, in all circumstances, of the full implementation of applicable international law and of the need to end impunity for violations of national and international law.

Determined progressively to strengthen the protection of civilians in general, and children in particular; and recognising the right to education and the role of education in promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations; we adopt the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict* and commit to:

- Incorporate these *Guidelines* into relevant domestic policy and operational frameworks, and to ensure their implementation in accordance with national policy and practice;
- Review relevant national laws to ensure that attacks on education are criminalised where necessary;
- Investigate attacks on education and prosecute as appropriate, in accordance with applicable national and international law;
- Make every effort to collect reliable relevant data with respect to victims of attacks on education; to facilitate such data collection by others; and to provide assistance to victims, on a non-discriminatory basis, towards the full realization of their human rights;
- Monitor and report on attacks on education and military use of schools and universities, using existing mechanisms where available;
- Develop, adopt and promote 'conflict-sensitive' approaches to education in humanitarian and development assistance programmes and at a national level as appropriate;
- Provide and facilitate cooperation and assistance to programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education and for implementing these commitments, where in a position to do so.
- Continue to support the work of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict, and the work of relevant UN offices and agencies, and to meet to review the implementation of these commitments on a regular basis.

We will work together and in partnership with civil society and international organizations to fulfill and advance these commitments towards safe schools for all.