

## Safe Schools Declaration

The impact of conflict and violence on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and wider social challenges. Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and students, teachers and academics have been murdered, kidnapped, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Education facilities have been used by armed forces and armed groups as bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose students and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and students their right to education and so deprive communities of the foundations on which to build their future. Especially in many of the world's poorest countries, violence continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children.

Attacks on education include violence against educational facilities, students and education personnel. Attacks, and threats of attack, can cause severe and long lasting harm to individuals and societies. Access to education may be undermined; the functioning of education facilities may be blocked, or education personnel and students may stay away, fearing for their safety. Attacks on schools and universities have been used to promote intolerance and exclusion – to further gender discrimination, for example by preventing the education of girls, to perpetuate conflict between certain communities, to restrict cultural diversity, and to deny academic freedom or the right of association. Where education facilities are used for military purposes it can increase the risk of child recruitment by armed actors or may leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation. In particular, it may increase the likelihood that education institutions are attacked.

By contrast, education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury and 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 as advice on specific risks in societies facing conflict and violence. 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 recognize our common 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 emphasize 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.

We welcome the development of the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict*. The Guidelines are non-legally binding, voluntary guidelines that do not affect existing obligations under international law. They draw on existing good practice and aim to provide guidance that will further minimise the impact of armed conflict on education. We welcome all efforts to disseminate these guidelines and to promote their implementation among armed forces, armed groups and other relevant actors.

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

Determined progressively to strengthen in practice the protection of civilians, and of children and youth in particular; recognizing the right to education and the role of education in promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations; and committed to working together towards safe schools for all; we endorse the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict*, and will:

- Incorporate these *Guidelines* into domestic policy and operational frameworks as appropriate;
- Monitor and report nationally on attacks on education and military use of schools and universities, using existing mechanisms where available;
- Collect reliable relevant data, at a national level, with respect to victims of attacks on education; facilitate such data collection by others; and assist victims, on a non-discriminatory basis;
- In the context of attacks on education, investigate allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and duly prosecute perpetrators;
- Develop, adopt and promote 'conflict-sensitive' approaches to education in international humanitarian and development programmes, and at a national level where relevant;
- Provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance to programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education, and for implementation of this Declaration, where in a position to do so;
- Support the efforts of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict, and of relevant UN entities and agencies, and to meet on a regular basis, together with international organizations and civil society, to review the implementation of this Declaration and of the Guidelines.