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News note

UNICEF condemns attacks on schools in Pakistan

GENEVA, 23 January 2009 - UNICEF is deeply concerned about the increasing number of attacks on school buildings in north-western Pakistan.

"UNICEF condemns these attacks which rob children of their basic right to education and have a devastating impact on their lives," said Daniel Toole, UNICEF's Regional Director for South Asia.

In a recent assault, five schools were blown up in Pakistan's Swat district and similar attacks continue to be reported.

Since 2007, more than 170 government and private schools, particularly girls' schools, have been blown up or burned down in the Federally Administered Tribal Area and the North West Frontier Province, reportedly by illegal armed groups. More schools have also closed due to occupation by illegal armed groups or security forces, or due to their female teachers being threatened.

Schools must be able to fully function to ensure the education of tens of thousands of students in the area. The government, development agencies, communities and parents in Pakistan have been working hard to overcome obstacles that can deter children, especially girls, from attending school. They understand that education is a fundamental human right and that it supports and fosters other rights like health, nutrition and protection. Education is also essential to restoring normalcy, especially in conflict situations.

In times of peace and in conflicts or emergencies, schools must be safe spaces for children. UNICEF calls on all groups, and particularly the government of Pakistan, to intensify efforts to protect schools, students and teachers in the areas of military operations.

"Attacks that target schools, educational institutions, children and teachers are unacceptable and must cease immediately," Toole said.

All children, including girls, must have unimpeded access to education. Girls who receive quality education are more empowered and better prepared to protect themselves against violence, abuse and exploitation.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments

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