

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SAFE SCHOOLS

27-29 May, Palma de Mallorca, Spain

CONCLUSIONS

During the Third International Conference on Safe Schools, delegations from 80 States, and 35 organizations from the United Nations, civil society, and academic institutions, gathered to discuss the pressing need for greater protection of students, teachers, and educational facilities during armed conflict. The conference provided an occasion for participants to identify practical solutions to improve the protection of education in situations of armed conflict, and to discuss opportunities for future cooperation in implementing the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) and the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#).

Nicaragua announced its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration at the conference, and Equatorial Guinea announced its endorsement immediately following the conference, bringing the total number of endorsing states to 91 since the Declaration was launched in May 2015.

During the high-level opening segment, Norway announced that it will establish a network of states to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange on implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration in 2020. Spain also announced the development of an international training program on the *Guidelines*. Strong cooperation and information sharing are instrumental for improving protection of students, teachers, and education staff.

Throughout the conference, discussions focused on achieving progress and greater clarity on three main issues:

The first issue discussed was the **gendered impact of attacks on education and of military use of educational facilities**. Women and girls are often targeted in attacks by groups that oppose education for girls. They may also be subject to specific forms of attack, such as rape, abduction, or recruitment, while at school, or on the way to and from educational facilities. For example, it was shared that in areas under DAESH control, schools were used to detain, rape, and sell women and girls. Even when women and girls are not specifically targeted because of their gender, the long-term consequences for women and girls can be different and they are often the first to drop out of school and the last to return. At the same time, in certain situations, boys are more vulnerable to certain kinds of attacks, such as recruitment. The importance of implementing the Safe Schools Declaration in a gender-responsive manner was underscored.

Another interesting debate focused on women's gaining access to high-level policy positions and how they are often named to Ministries of Education, as well as the importance of women taking on high-profile appointments, and of Ministries of Education actually becoming a high-profile appointment to provide education with the means and prestige that it deserves, especially in conflict-ridden countries.

Special emphasis was placed on generating synergies between different agendas, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was highlighted that the upcoming High-Level Political Forum in July will review SDG 4 on quality education. This global goal recognizes the need to protect education from attack with a specific thematic indicator on recording the number of attacks on students, personnel, and educational institutions. Many voices at the conference called for the Forum to highlight the Safe Schools Declaration as a tool for achieving SDG 4, as well as address education in emergencies and protection of education in conflict situations.

Secondly, the need to improve **monitoring and reporting of attacks on education to inform prevention, mitigation, and accountability mechanisms** was emphasized at the conference. Systematic and reliable data on attacks against students, teachers, and education centres is essential for adopting effective prevention and response measures, for bringing those responsible for attacks to justice, and providing assistance to victims.

There are a number of challenges to collecting data on attacks on education. Perhaps the most obvious is the lack of an agreed definition of an attack on education. Moreover, there is no comprehensive and systematic mechanism for reporting these violations. Other significant challenges include limited technical capacity, few financial resources, and difficulties in accessing conflict zones where attacks on education occur.

Panellists at the conference underlined that there are significant data gaps, particularly in relation to gender-disaggregated data and the intersections between child recruitment, sexual violence, military use of educational facilities, and attacks on educational facilities. Positive recommendations were made on linking agendas and using the synergies offered by different monitoring and research mechanisms in other areas, such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) monitoring of attacks on medical missions, or the UN Security Council's agenda on Children and Armed Conflict. Spain expressed support for the work carried out by UNICEF and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) on strengthening monitoring and reporting of attacks on education

As regards accountability and combating impunity, the efforts being made by the International Criminal Court (ICC) were highlighted, with a focus on guaranteeing compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Although the primary responsibility falls to each State, active collaboration is essential amongst the States, the UN and the ICC.

Thirdly, participants discussed **practical implementation of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict***, highlighting the need for coordination among ministries of defence, education, interior, and foreign affairs in order for the *Guidelines* to be effectively incorporated into states' operational military manuals, policies, and legislation. The session also underscored the importance of engaging with non-State armed actors, so they are familiar with the *Guidelines* and integrate them into their military rules.

By gathering high-level representatives from governments, international organizations, and civil society to re-affirm their commitment to protecting education in armed conflict, and sharing good practice in implementing the Declaration, the conference served to galvanize support and accelerate momentum towards achieving the right to education for all.