What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions?

The **SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION**[1], an intergovernmental political commitment championed by the governments of Argentina and Norway, aims to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from targeted and indiscriminate attacks by armed forces and armed groups, as well as to restrict military use of educational infrastructure. The Declaration includes a range of commitments, linked to specific, concrete actions, that can reduce the risk of attack, and mitigate the impact of attacks and military use when they do occur.

Girls and women can be differently impacted by attacks on education and military use of schools and universities than boys and men, and may require different responses to support their recovery and return to education. To better protect and meet the needs of women and girls, the Safe Schools Declaration should be implemented in a gender-responsive[2] way to take into account the specific ways that females are targeted and/or impacted.

The following is a set of recommendations for states to consider when seeking to implement each commitment within the Declaration in a way that will better protect women and girls. These recommendations are based on a case-study conducted by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) in Nigeria on how women and girls are impacted by attacks on education and military use of schools, as well as recommendations in GCPEA's other publications, particularly *Education under Attack 2018*[3]. These recommendations were reviewed by GCPEA's working group on protecting women and girls, which is comprised of education in emergencies and gender experts from a range of UN agencies and international NGOs. The recommendations are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive, but simply to offer guidance to states interested in actions they may take to implement the Safe Schools Declaration in a way that considers the specific needs of women and girls.

GCPEA encourages states to share these recommendations with policy makers in relevant ministries, including those responsible for education, higher education, and women and girls. As GCPEA conducts additional research on protecting women and girls from attacks on education, it will review and revise these recommendations. It should be noted that many of the recommendations are not limited to protecting women and girls, but will also enhance protections for men and boys. In this way, the recommendations are intended to contribute to better protection of education for all.

Global Coalition to
Protect Education from Attack

GCPEA

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

States, civil society, and international agencies should support efforts to:

- *Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration to ensure that all students and educators, male and female, can learn and teach in safety;*

- *Avoid using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the **Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict**, taking into account the ways in which female students and educators may be impacted by having soldiers in the vicinity of their schools and universities;*

- *Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education and of military use of educational facilities, including by disaggregating data on numbers of students and education staff affected by sex and indicating when sexual violence by parties to armed conflict, or child recruitment, occurs at, or on the way to and from, schools so that they can be captured as attacks on education;*

- *Systematically investigate attacks on education, including sexual and gender-based violence by parties to the conflict at, or on the way to, school or universities. Collect and preserve evidence in a way that will permit it to be used as evidence in prosecutions. Ensure that affected and at-risk populations, particularly female survivors of attacks on education, can access the justice system, for example, by providing free access to legal assistance. Prosecute all perpetrators, and impose administrative sanctions, through all appropriate national and international mechanisms;*

- *Provide non-discriminatory assistance to all victims of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs of males and females, including provision of medical and psycho-social services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence;*

- *Ensure that education promotes peace instead of triggering conflict, and that it provides physical and psychological protection for students, including by addressing gender-based stereotypes and barriers that can trigger, exacerbate, and follow attacks on education;*

- *Where feasible, maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, including by engaging with school and university communities in developing risk analyses, early warning systems, and comprehensive safety and security plans for attacks on education, including special protections for girls and women where they are, or are likely to be, specifically targeted or affected differently than boys and men;*

- *When schools and univerities must be closed for safety reasons, minimize interruption of learning by creating alternative learning opportunities, taking into account the particular needs of girls and women, including restrictive practices and gender roles and responsibilities that may discourage their continuation of education;*

- *Strengthen political support in international, regional, and national fora for concrete action to ensure safe education for women and girls in conflict settings; and*

- *Foster exchanges to discuss the challenges faced by girls and women who seek to access education in situations of conflict, and gender-responsive ways to address these challenges.*

EXPANDED RECOMMENDATIONS:

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Use the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and bring them into domestic policy and operational frameworks.*

- *Avoid using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, taking into account the ways in which female students and educators may be impacted by having soldiers in the vicinity of their schools and universities.*
  - **Raise awareness of the risks associated with military use of educational infrastructure.** Inform security and military personnel, as well as community leaders and members, of the risks of military use of school and universities, including increased risk of attack, and the particular risks for women and girls, including sexual exploitation and abuse by parties to the conflict.
  - **Avoid military use of education premises**. The Ministry of Defense should issue orders to all security forces to avoid using schools or universities for military purposes. Integrate the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* into domestic policy, operational frameworks, and training manuals as far as possible.
  - **Engage gender specialists to review military policies.** Review military policy and doctrine to ensure that they do not place women and girls at particular risk, and hold regular trainings on implementing protections for education that account for the specific needs of males and females.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Collect reliable, relevant data on attacks on education, including through existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms.*

- *Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education and of military use of educational facilities, including by disaggregating data on numbers of students and education staff affected by sex and indicating when sexual violence by parties to armed conflict, or child recruitment, occurs at, or on the way to and from, schools so that they can be captured as attacks on education.*
  - **Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education.** Ensure that monitoring systems collect and report sex-disaggregated data on attacks on education and military use of schools or universities, identifying the number of males and females affected.
  - **Collect data on sexual violence and child recruitment as attacks on education**. Include and indicate when child recruitment and sexual violence by parties to the conflict occurs at, or on the way to or from school or university, when abductions occur at education institutions, when victims are abducted from other locations because of their status as students or education personnel, and when abductions are accompanied by rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Investigate allegations of violations of applicable international law and where appropriate duly prosecute perpetrators.*

- *Systematically investigate attacks on education, including sexual and gender-based violence by parties to the conflict at, or on the way to school or universities. Collect and preserve evidence in a way that will permit it to be used as evidence in prosecutions. Ensure that affected and at-risk populations, particularly female survivors of attacks on education, can access the justice system, for example, by providing free access to legal assistance. Prosecute all perpetrators, and impose administrative sanctions, through all appropriate national and international mechanisms.*

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- o **Impartially investigate and prosecute perpetrators of attacks on education.** Investigate allegations of applicable international law including sexual and gender-based violence, and prosecute perpetrators when appropriate.
- o **Support international accountability measures**. Promote accountability measures through international channels, such as the International Criminal Court, the Human Rights Council, UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies, among others.
- o **Support access to justice.** Conduct outreach to ensure affected and at-risk populations, particularly women and girl survivors of attacks on education, including abduction and sexual violence, are aware of their rights and can access the justice system.
- o **Investigate past incidents of attacks on education that have not yet been pursued.** Identify patterns of abuse and any protection gaps from past attacks on education, paying attention to distinct experiences and needs according to age and gender, including by conducting transparent and independent investigations. Publicize the findings of these investigations, and incorporate lessons learned into future protection measures and strategies to prevent such attacks.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Provide assistance to victims.*

- • *Provide non-discriminatory assistance to all victims of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs of males and females, including provision of medical and counselling services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.*
  - o **Provide medical and psychosocial support for victims.** Take necessary steps to expand availability of free and confidential medical and psychosocial services for victims of conflict-related violence, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, and ensure that victims are aware of such services and how to access them.
  - o **Ensure equal access of victims to health care, psychosocial support services, and education programs.** Ensure programs do not discriminate against girls and women on the basis of their gender or experience of violations, such as abduction, forced marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, and other violations.
  - o **Support children born as a result of rape during attacks on education or other conflict-related violence.** Provide specialized psychosocial support and other services for the children born as a result of rape by parties to the conflict, including long-term child protection monitoring and support.
  - o **Develop a clear policy to support and protect the education rights of pregnant girls.** Ensure that pregnant girls are able to continue with their education while pregnant and to re-enter school after giving birth.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Develop, adopt, and promote conflict-sensitive approaches to education.*

- • *Ensure that education promotes peace instead of triggering conflict and that it provides physical and psycho-social protection for students, including by addressing gender-based stereotypes and barriers that can trigger, exacerbate, and follow attacks on education.*
  - o **Adopt gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive education policies.** Develop policies and practices in accordance with the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE's) Minimum Standards for Education, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC's) Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action, IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, and UNFPA's Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies,

among other international standards on gender-based violence in emergencies, and take all necessary steps to ensure that all students and educators, including female students and teachers, can learn and teach in a safe and secure environment.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict and support the re-establishment of education facilities, and provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance to programs working to prevent or respond to attacks on education.*

- *Where feasible, maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, including by engaging with school and university communities and other relevant stakeholders in developing risk-reduction strategies and comprehensive safety and security plans for attacks on education, including targeted attacks on females.*

    a) **Implement risk analyses and responses**

    - **Conduct a thorough risk analysis for each functioning school in locations at risk of attack.** Prioritize schools at high risk of attack, including those located in remote areas with female students. The risk analysis should identify possible threats to the school, students, teachers, and community members, and assess the probability of attack. Also assess vulnerabilities in school infrastructure, assess and map evacuation routes, and identify the adequacy of means to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities.

    - **Develop criteria for closure and re-opening of schools.** Establish clear and transparent criteria for determining when to close and reopen schools due to insecurity, paying attention to distinct risks and needs according to age and gender. The criteria should prioritize the protection and safety of students and staff and recognize that continuing education in a safe environment may not be possible.[4]

    - **Close schools and universities for safety reasons.** If it is determined that a school is vulnerable to attack and that adequate mitigation is not possible, the school should be closed. The school should only be reopened after a new risk analysis determines that the school is safe and secure.

    b) **Improve early warning systems and protective response**

    - **Create a Rapid Reaction Unit within police and military units.** The Rapid Reaction Units should be specifically assigned responsibility for being first responders to attacks on schools and the prevention of violence against students and educators. These units should have specific training in protecting female students and teachers from abduction and sexual violence, among other things.

    - **Create systematic early warning systems**. Establish systems for collecting information about potential attacks on education, such as threatening letters sent to schools or posted on social media, or insurgent movements. Share this early-warning information and accurate, up-to-date security information with school administrators, students, teachers, Ministry of Education personnel, and local communities.

    - **Provide information about significant changes in security deployment**. The Ministry of Defense should provide Ministry of Education personnel, school administrators, and local police forces with sufficient notice before security forces withdraw from an area or make other significant changes that could affect school safety.

    - **Ensure community participation in decision-making**. Consult with students, teachers, school administrators, and local communities, including women and girls, in determining measures to prevent attacks on schools, students, and staff, including in risk assessments and in developing security protocols and response mechanisms. Collaborate with School-based Management Committees where they exist, and encourage the participation of women in such committees.

c)   Develop and implement comprehensive school-based safety and security measures.

o **Ensure that each school has a comprehensive school-based safety and security plan.** Plans should include the establishment of school safety committees, locally developed coordination mechanisms (e.g. Parent Teacher Associations), comprehensive planning processes, risk assessments, response plans, training for education personnel, community members, parents, and students in the implementation of the safety plan, and early warning systems. The plans should take into account the specific risks for girls and women.[5]

o **Establish school security committees.** Establish a body within each school with the explicit responsibility for developing and implementing comprehensive school-based safety and security plans. This responsibility may be assigned, for example, to the School-based Management Committee or to a specialized school safety committee. The committee should include not only the school administration, local, and state Ministry of Education representatives, but also teacher, parent, and student representatives, as well as designated security experts. The committee should pay special attention to the specific concerns and protection needs of girls and women, while ensuring that the committee has gender parity and meaningfully includes women in decision-making.

o **Create an information-sharing protocol.** Create a protocol for handling all threats of attack, information about possible attacks, or other security concerns. Ensure that local school personnel are obligated to inform the designated School-based Security Committee, locally and regionally based security and police forces, as well as their superiors within the Ministry of Education, of all such threats, to facilitate early warning and effective early response.

o **Provide emergency preparedness training to teachers and other educational personnel.** Training should include regular school drills and review of security protocols, to ensure that students and staff know what steps to take if their school is attacked. Training should be updated on a regular basis, taking into account recent developments in the conflict and the context of attacks on education. Training should consider specific risks for girls and women.

o **Increase presence of female teachers/assistants.** Ministries of Education should develop measures to encourage more women to become teachers and more female teachers to return to teaching, especially in areas affected by conflict. Where female teachers are not available, schools should recruit women from the community as teaching assistants to promote a more protective environment for children.

d)   Strengthen school infrastructure and physical protection capacity.

o **Ensure the presence of trained and vetted school security guards appropriate to the level of risk.** Whenever feasible, prioritize unarmed protection for schools over armed school guards because armed guards can increase the risk that bystanders will be harmed if armed guards are targeted by insurgents, and may themselves harass or sexually abuse girls and women.[6] However, in some situations of extreme violence, armed guards may be the only viable means of protecting schools from attack. Under such circumstances, put in place measures to ensure that these guards protect, rather than endanger, the students and school staff. Armed guards should be sufficient in number and capacity to protect the facility, students and staff; be physically separated from students as much as possible; and be assigned only as a temporary measure until adequate security infrastructure and physical protections can be installed.

o **Provide adequate numbers of female guards**. Provide enough female guards to ensure that female guards are responsible for direct interactions with female students. Where possible, ensure that male guards do not conduct body or bag searches of female students.

o **Properly train guards.** Ensure that guards are properly trained to protect students and teachers, including in best practices for protecting children, as well as girls and women, from attack.

o **Establish and strictly enforce codes of conduct for guards.** Codes should set out, for example, the guards' responsibility to protect students and their duties when a school is under attack, including

the duty to remain present in the school until all students have been safely evacuated or the attack has ended, and the insurgents are no longer present. Ensure that codes of conduct include appropriate behavior in relation to female students and education staff.

- o **Facilitate the safe and confidential reporting of abuse by guards.** Establish safe and confidential systems and protocols in schools to report abuse, including gender-based violence by security personnel, and ensure students' access to referral mechanisms for support if abuse occurs.
- o **Ensure strong female participation in policy development and implementation.** Ensure the involvement of female students and teachers, as well as gender specialists, in the development of security protocols and strategies to prevent attacks on education against female students, as well as sexual and gender-based violence, and to mitigate harm caused by such abuses.
- o **Provide financial support for enhanced protection measures.** Seek the support of international donors and increase national funding to enhance security measures for at-risk schools, including physical barriers, emergency communications systems, systematic early warning systems, the development of comprehensive school-based safety and security plans, and programs to provide security training for educators, among other measures.

e) **Prioritize protection of students in all future construction/renovation of schools.**

- o **Place new schools in the most secure and accessible locations.** Work with local communities, including parents and women, to ensure that the safest, most secure, and most accessible location is selected for all newly constructed schools and that, where possible, the new school is near a town or village so that it is not isolated.
- o **Ensure safe and gender-sensitive design of schools.**[7] With international donor support, ensure that newly-constructed schools have adequate boundary walls or fences, emergency means of communication, and separate toilets that lock from the inside for female and male students. Promptly install these in existing schools where they do not already exist.

- *When schools and universities must be closed for safety reasons, minimize interruption of learning by creating alternative learning opportunities, taking into account the particular needs of girls and women, including restrictive practices and gender roles and responsibilities that may discourage their continuation of education.*
  - o **When a school must be closed due to insecurity, consider whether students can be safely relocated to a more secure area**. Engage parents so that they feel confident allowing their daughters to relocate. Develop programs and policies to respond effectively to the specific protection concerns of relocated children, such as social ostracism. Ensure that pregnant girls or young mothers, who may have become pregnant as a result of rape during attacks on education, are supported to relocate to schools in secure areas.
  - o **Support temporary substitute educational arrangements.** In the absence of formal education opportunities, provide quality, non-formal,[8] and accelerated education[9] in safe spaces for girls and women to catch up on education they have missed. Ensure that certificates from these programs are recognized so that students can return to formal schools as soon as possible, sit for final examinations as in the formal system, or have access to relevant, good quality vocational training opportunities. Ensure that girls who do not wish to, or cannot return to formal education, have access to good quality vocational and life skills training options with certifications recognized in their own countries.
  - o **Explore and expand possibilities for alternative delivery of education.** Expand provision of alternative delivery of education. Such programs may include distance learning, online learning, and radio and television learning, with curricula that is not gender-biased. These can be temporary methods of learning support until formal schooling resumes, but longer-term possibilities for distance learning may be explored.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Support the efforts of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict, and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant UN organs, entities and agencies.*

- *Strengthen political support in international, regional, and national fora for concrete action to ensure safe education for women and girls in conflict settings.*
  - o **Consistently raise the issue of attacks on and military use of schools.** During discussions in relevant multilateral fora, highlight how attacks on education and military use of schools and universities impede girls' and women's safety and their right to education.
  - o **Strengthen references to protection of women and girls.** In relevant negotiated documents, seek to include or strengthen references to protecting education from attack and educational facilities from military use, and the need to continue safe education for girls and women in conflict settings.

DECLARATION COMMITMENT: *Meet on a regular basis, inviting relevant international organizations and civil society, so as to review the implementation of this Declaration and the use of the Guidelines.*

- *Foster exchanges to discuss the particular challenges faced by girls and women who seek safe education in situations of conflict, and gender-responsive ways to address these challenges.*
  - o **Organize, host, or participate in conferences, briefings, workshops, or other meetings to review implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.** Include discussion of the particular challenges faced by girls and women, and gender-responsive ways to address these challenges in these meetings and events.

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[1] The *Safe Schools Declaration* and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* can be found at http://www.protectingeducation.org/safe-schools-declaration-guidelines

[2] The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE's) Gender Pocket Guide states: "Gender responsive is a state of recognition and reaction to gender inequality in implementing activities, policies, and programs. A program, policy, or activity that is gender responsive addresses gender-based barriers, respects gender differences, enables structures, systems, and methodologies to be sensitive to gender, ensures gender parity is a wider strategy to advance gender equality and evolves to close gaps and eradicate gender-based discrimination."

[3] GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2018, (2018) see http://eua2018.protectingeducation.org/.

[4] See INEE, Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery, 2nd ed. 2010, http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/INEE_Minimum_Standards_Handbook_2010_English.pdf.

[5] For additional information, see GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," September 2016, pp. 38-39, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf, (accessed August 30, 2017).

[6] See GCPEA, "Technical Guide: What Teachers and School Administrators Can Do to Protection Education from Attack," as well as the report "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack," p. 3, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/technical_guide_2017.pdf.

[7] See, for example, UNICEF, Child Friendly Schools, March 2009, *https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Child_Friendly_Schools_Manual_EN_040809.pdf.* See also INEE, Guidance Notes on Safer School Construction, 2009, http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1005/INEE_Guidance_Notes_Safer_School_Constr_EN.pdf.

[8] UNESCO defines non-formal education as: "Education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters for people of all ages, but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications by the relevant national educational authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development." (see: http://uis.unesco.org/node/334726 / ISCED 2011)

[9] The Inter Agency Working Group on Accelerated Education states: "Accelerated Education is a flexible, age-appropriate programme, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who missed out on, or had their education interrupted by, poverty, marginalisation, conflict and crisis. The goal of Accelerated Education Programmes is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity." (see http://www.ineesite.org/en/accelerated-education)