

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**EDUCATION  
UNDER ATTACK  
2018**



## Global Coalition to **Protect Education from Attack**

This study is published by the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, which was formed in 2010 by organizations working in the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected contexts, higher education, protection, and international human rights and humanitarian law that were concerned about ongoing attacks on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity.

GCPEA is a coalition of organizations that includes: co-chairs Human Rights Watch and Save the Children, the Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara), the Education Above All Foundation (EAA), the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

This study is the result of independent research conducted by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations.

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التعليم | education  
فوق | above  
الجميع | all

 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY | MAILMAN SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK 2018

A global study of threats or use of force, either deliberate or indiscriminate, against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff or education officials, and against schools, universities and other education institutions carried out for political military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic or religious reasons from 2013 to 2017.

## Attacks on education and military use of schools and universities in profiled countries, 2013-2017

### Very heavily affected

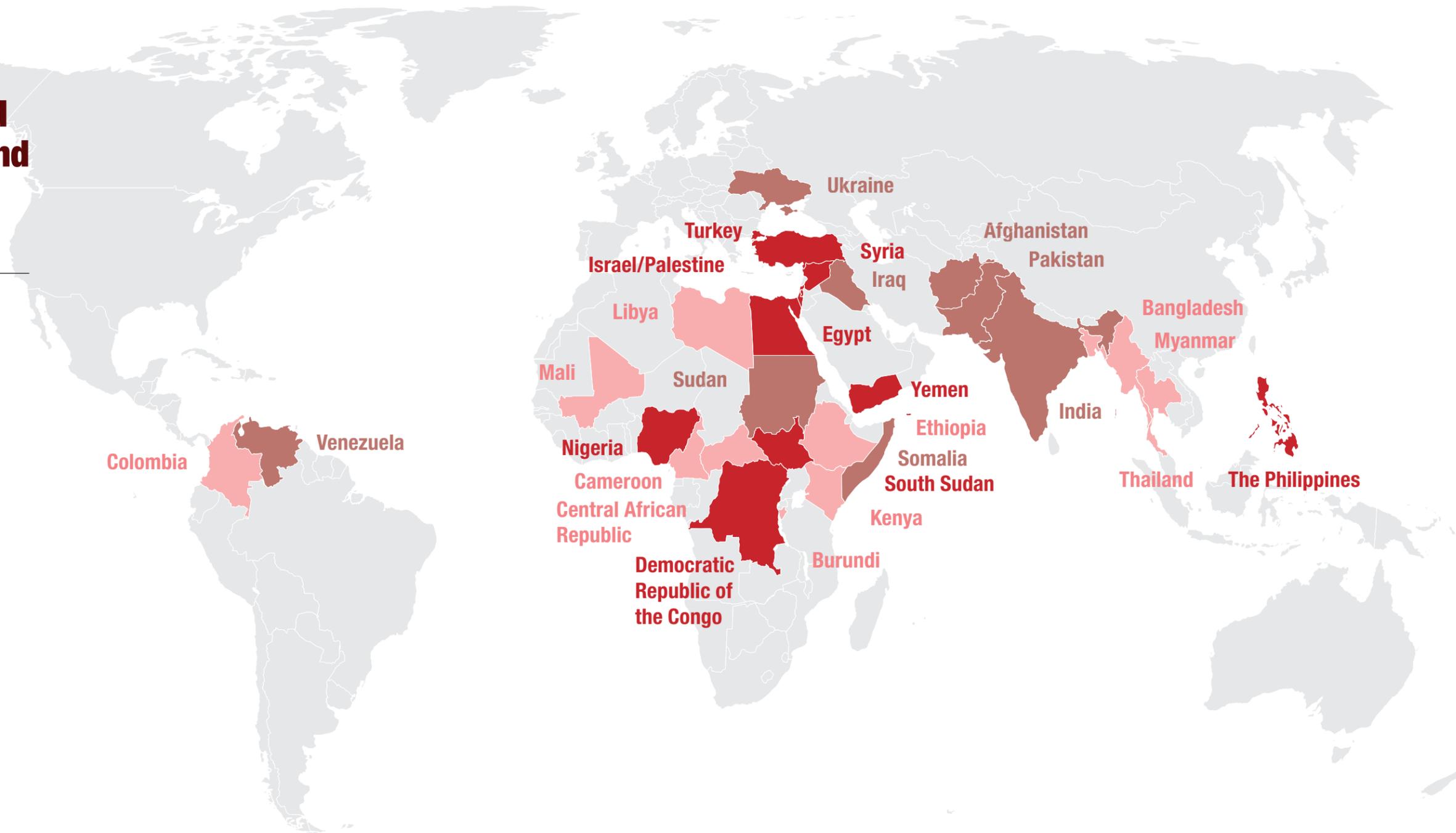
Countries where reports documented 1000 or more incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 1000 or more students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

### Heavily affected

Countries where reports documented between 500 and 999 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or between 500 and 999 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

### Affected

Countries where reports documented fewer than 500 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or under 500 students and education personnel harmed by attacks



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**O**n April 14, 2014, a group of fighters from Boko Haram came to my hometown in Chibok at night while people were asleep. They shot guns as they entered the town, but I was sleeping at the school where I study, and I didn't hear it.

*My friend woke me up. She said to me, "Joy, can't you hear what is going on outside the gate?" ...That was the first time I heard the voices of the Boko Haram fighters. They were shouting and shooting their guns.*

*We were all scared. We prayed for our families at home, and we asked God to protect them wherever they were.*

*As we were deciding what we should do, a man came in. We tried to escape, but he told us he was a policeman and we could trust him—that he was there to protect us from what was going on outside. He asked us to come, and we did.*

*But he lied! He wasn't a policeman. He was one of the Boko Haram people.*

*Afterwards, many of the people from Boko Haram began coming in from different directions. They told us that we had to cooperate with them because they are people who kill without mercy. They told us to follow them, and they loaded us into three big trucks to take us away from our school.*

*I prayed and asked God to save me. He answered my prayer. I jumped out of the truck and ran for hours and hours to get away. On my way, I met two of my classmates who also jumped out. We continued running together.*

*As we were running, a man passed us on a motorcycle. We stopped him and asked for help. He took us back to Chibok.*

*Whenever I think of that horrible night, I pray for the safety of every student at school everywhere. I know what it feels like—it doesn't feel good at all—when all you ever wanted was to study and achieve your dream, and then all of a sudden, in just a few minutes, your hopes and dreams fall like a leaf from a tree.*

—JOY BISHARA, SPEAKING BEFORE THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL,  
OCTOBER 13, 2017



This photo taken from a video by Boko Haram allegedly shows girls four weeks after they were abducted by the group from their school in the northeastern town of Chibok, Nigeria in April 2014.

© 2014 AP Photo/File

On the night of April 14, 2014, Joy Bishara and more than 270 of her classmates were kidnapped by members of the armed extremist group Boko Haram from a government-run secondary school for girls in Chibok, Nigeria. The men who attacked the school, some wearing police uniforms, claimed they had received information that the school was going to be attacked and that they were there to take the girls to a safe location. Instead they abducted them and destroyed the school.

Fifty-seven of the girls—including Joy—were able to escape soon after being kidnapped, but more than two hundred remained captive for years. In the months and years that followed, the kidnapping gained international attention and sparked the campaign, ‘Bring Back Our Girls.’ Negotiations led to approximately one hundred girls being released in 2016 and 2017, but more than one hundred were still missing as of the time of writing.

The girls at the secondary school in Chibok were not alone in risking their lives in order to study and learn. **Attacks on students, teachers, professors, schools, and universities, as well as the use of schools and universities for military purposes, are commonplace in many countries. In some, the situation is getting worse.**

The fourth in a series, this current edition of *Education under Attack* examines the threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, education personnel, or educational facilities and materials. The report, which tracks attacks on education and the military use of schools and universities across the globe, shows that, between 2013 and 2017, attacks on education and military use of schools and universities killed or injured thousands of students and educators and damaged or destroyed hundreds of schools and higher education facilities.



At a school located on the frontline of conflict in Marjinka, Ukraine, sandbags are stacked in front of classroom windows and armed police officers patrol the school grounds and entrance for protection.

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Each of the 28 countries profiled in this report experienced at least 20 attacks on education between 2013 and 2017, the period covered by the current study: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.

Including the 28 countries profiled in the report, GCPEA found attacks on education in 74 countries. At least 5 but fewer than 20 incidents of attacks on education, in which at least one incident was a direct attack or killed at least one person, were reported in 13 countries. Isolated incidents of attack on education were documented in 33 other countries.

Attacks on education may be committed for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons. As Joy's story shows, students and education staff have been killed, injured, and traumatized, and school and university buildings damaged and destroyed. The use of schools and universities for military purposes can make the buildings targets of attack by opposing forces, putting the lives of students and teachers in danger. In addition to the risk of death and injury, military use of educational facilities often prevents students from accessing education. Beyond these immediate impacts, attacks on education and military use of schools and universities limit access to educational opportunities, diminish the quality of education, and obstruct social progress and development.

This fourth edition of *Education under Attack* builds on two studies published by UNESCO in 2007 and 2010, and a third study published by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) in 2014. In the last decade since this series was begun, reporting on attacks has improved significantly in many places. Accordingly, analyzing trends in attacks over the time period was challenging because apparent trends may reflect changes in access to information rather than actual increases or decreases in the number of attacks. Nevertheless, this study compares global patterns of attacks on education during the 2013-2017 period to those reported in the previous study, to the greatest extent possible. It does so by employing a methodology similar to that used for the 2014 edition, which relies on three methods of research: a search of reports by UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and human rights and monitoring organizations; a search of media reports; and interviews with groups collecting data in the countries profiled and with country experts.

The overall number of attacks on education documented in *Education under Attack 2018* suggests that violence directed at students, educators, and their institutions increased worldwide between January 2013 and December 2017 from the 2009 to mid-2013 period covered in *Education under Attack 2014*.

This study found that there were reports of more than 1,000 individual attacks on education or cases of military use of schools or universities, or of 1,000 or more students, teachers, or other education personnel being harmed, in 9 countries: DRC, Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen.

Each country profile includes information on six categories of attacks on education, as relevant:

- Physical attacks or threats of attacks on schools
- Physical attacks or threats directed at students, teachers, and other education personnel
- Military use of schools and universities
- Child recruitment at, or en route to or from, school or university
- Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school or university
- Attacks on higher education

Attacks on schools were most commonly reported in DRC, Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, and Yemen. For example, OCHA reported in December 2017 that 256 schools had been fully destroyed and another 1,413 schools partially damaged in Yemen.

## “The whole school shook.”

Muhammad al-Anadani, a teacher at the Center for Children's Training and Rehabilitation in Aleppo, Syria, described to journalists what happened on May 3, 2015, when his school was struck by a barrel bomb: “It was recess time and I was at the administration office. I heard people in the street screaming ‘Be careful! They are dropping!’ We didn't realize that they would target us. We were sort of calm, but the sound of the barrel bomb was getting closer, and then we heard a terrifying explosion. The whole school shook, and I flew to the other side of the room. I heard the kids screaming. I rushed out of the office and what I saw was horrifying. For a moment, I thought that everyone was killed. Then I rushed to help paramedics and get the survivors out of school. As I learned later, nine kids and two teachers were killed.”

Reports suggested that students and educators were individually targeted most frequently in Afghanistan, Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, and the Philippines. In Afghanistan and Nigeria, these attacks included targeted killings, abductions, and threats. In Israel/Palestine, students, teachers, and education staff were most commonly injured or arrested when they protested military and settler presence in and nearby schools. In the Philippines, indigenous students faced intimidation and harassment by armed forces and paramilitary groups. The indigenous advocacy network Save Our Schools documented an intensification of threats and harassment by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and associated paramilitary groups, which targeted students and teachers in indigenous communities.

## “We will chop you up and kill you.”

At the Mindanao Interfaith School Foundation Academy's Talaingod campus in the Philippines, Human Rights Watch reported in 2015 that soldiers had been intimidating and harassing students and teachers since 2012. One teacher told Human Rights Watch that a group of soldiers and members of the Alamara paramilitary stopped him while he was on his way to school on January 5, 2015. He reported that they told him, “If you go through, we will chop you up and kill you.”



**Military use of schools or universities was reported at least once in 29 countries**, including 24 of those profiled in this report: Afghanistan, Burundi, CAR, Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, Yemen, and Zimbabwe. These included cases in which armed forces or non-state armed groups used schools as bases, barracks, temporary shelters, fighting positions, weapons storage facilities, detention and interrogation centers, or military training facilities.

## “They used our school grounds as their toilet.”

In 2016 and 2017, Human Rights Watch documented the occupation of schools in CAR by Seleka fighters, anti-balaka fighters, and UN forces. One school official described to Human Rights Watch the lasting effects anti-balaka fighters had on his school when they occupied it from late 2014 to October 2016: “They destroyed desks and chairs. We were able to get them to vacate one of the buildings so we could restart the school, but they still occupied half of the school and ruined the building. They would smoke marijuana all day and they said they were waiting for DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration]. They would go out on the main road and put up roadblocks on the street, stop vehicles and take money from them at gunpoint. They used our school grounds as their toilet. They used the desks for firewood and destroyed at least 75 of them. When the building is repaired we will use it again.”

Seleka MPC (Central African Patriotic Movement) fighters use a desk they removed from the local school in Mbrès, Nana-Grébizi province, Central African Republic, in March 2017. All three schools in the town had been closed since 2013 because of the presence of fighters, a lack of teachers, and tensions between armed groups.

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Limitations in the information reported made it difficult to assess the extent to which schools served as locales for child recruitment or sexual violence. Nevertheless, GCPEA found reports of **child recruitment in 16 of the countries profiled in this report**: Afghanistan, Colombia, DRC, Iraq, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and Yemen.

Both male and female children and adults were victims of sexual violence perpetrated by armed parties in school or university settings. GCPEA found reports that parties to conflicts were responsible for **sexual violence occurring at, or en route to or from, school or university in 17 countries** profiled in the report: Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Colombia, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Sudan, Venezuela, and Yemen. In DRC, for example, the Education Cluster reported that militiamen abducted 17 girls from primary schools in 2017 and raped them over the course of several months.

Girls and women were uniquely targeted because of their gender, not only as victims of sexual violence but also where armed groups opposed female education. **Girls and women were targets of attacks on education because of their gender in at least 18 of the 28 countries** profiled in this report: Afghanistan, Cameroon, CAR, Colombia, DRC, Egypt, India, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen. These attacks included sexual violence and other forms of attacks on education. For instance, in July 2016, an unidentified attacker on a motorcycle threw acid into the eyes of three female high school students in Herat province in Afghanistan.

At their graduation ceremony on October 24, 2016, students from the chemical engineering department of Benghazi University, Libya, pose next to defused ammunitions and explosive devices outside a university building that was destroyed during fighting.

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Attacks on higher education staff and infrastructure were widely reported in every country profiled, including **attacks on higher education buildings in 20 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Syria, Thailand, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen.** In Bangladesh, for example, approximately 28 explosive attacks were reported at the University of Dhaka during the first three months of 2015 alone. **Higher education personnel were attacked in every country profiled** in this report, which included violent repression of education-related protests that harmed students or education staff.

## University students shot in their rooms

On the morning of December 1, 2017, Taliban gunmen attacked the Agricultural Training Institute in Peshawar, Pakistan. One student told the *Dawn* newspaper, “I was asleep. When we heard the gunshots, we quickly shut our room’s door and made phone calls to find out what was happening. We were told that the people outside are terrorists and that we should keep our room’s door shut ... The terrorists shot at everyone who was roaming around and they were breaking doors down to attack students. Thankfully security personnel reached the hostel before those men came to our room—that is why we are alive.” Although many students had gone home for a holiday when the attack occurred, 9 people were killed, including at least 6 students, and at least 35 injured.

As reporting on attacks on education and their devastating effects has become more common, so have efforts to prevent such attacks and address their impact. This attention was perhaps most evident in specific commitments that more than one-third of the UN member states (so far) have made to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from attack. As of April 2018, 74 states had endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, an intergovernmental political commitment to protect education during armed conflict. Widespread endorsement has been accompanied by an increasing number of states implementing the promises made in the declaration by changing laws or changing military or education policies.

The UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, UN treaty bodies, international courts, and aid and humanitarian organizations in turn gave considerable attention to attacks on education and military use of schools and universities.

These gains are laudable, yet there is still significant work to be done to protect students, educators, and educational institutions from attacks on education and military use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To protect education more effectively, GCPEA urges states, international agencies, and civil society organizations to:

- Endorse, implement, and support 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*.
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, including disaggregating data by type of attack on education, sex, age, and type of schooling, in order to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education.
- Systematically investigate attacks on education and prosecute perpetrators.
- Provide nondiscriminatory assistance for all victims of attacks on education, taking into account the different needs and experiences of males and females.
- Ensure that education promotes peace instead of triggering conflict, and that it provides physical and psychosocial 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 and all other relevant stakeholders in developing risk-reduction strategies and comprehensive safety and security plans for attacks on education.

WHEN SPEAKING TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL ON OCTOBER 13, 2017,  
JOY BISHARA CALLED FOR THE PROTECTION OF EDUCATION

*Schools need to be protected. Students need to feel safe.  
They need to study and work towards their dreams without  
fear. This is the only way they will be able to go out and  
make a change in the world. I hope and pray that no more  
students will go through what I went through.*

Students play together on the playground of a damaged school  
in eastern Aleppo's countryside, Syria, in September 2017.

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**(Cover)** A Syrian child looks into a school classroom damaged during a reported air strike on March 7, 2017, in the opposition-held town of Utaya, near the city of Damascus.

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