



*Photo: Rt Hon. Ibrahim Zana Sunoma, Speaker, Borno State Children's Parliament calls on world leaders to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration*

# OUTCOME REPORT ON THE ABUJA CONFERENCE ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION, 2021



## 4<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION ABUJA, NIGERIA 25-27 OCTOBER, 2021



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



Ministerio de Relaciones Exterior  
Comercio Internacional y Culto  
Argentina



GOBIERNO  
DE ESPAÑA  
MINISTERIO  
DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES, UNIÓN EUROPEA  
Y COOPERACIÓN



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# Foreword



It is my great pleasure to present the report of the 4th International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, which took place in Abuja, Nigeria, from 25–27 October 2021. It was hosted by the Government of Nigeria, together with the Governments of Argentina, Norway, and Spain, as well as the African Union Commission and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack. As of January 2022, 113 United Nations (UN) member states had endorsed the Declaration.

With the theme of “Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice,” the overarching aim of the Abuja Conference was to take stock and review progress in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (“the Guidelines”), and to galvanise commitment and action to protect education from attack.

Over the course of the three-day conference, 400 delegates from 27 States and 1,936 delegates from 124 States attended in-person and virtually, respectively. They comprised members of international organisations, ministries of education, foreign affairs, defence, and justice, as well as civil society and academia. The deliberations included discussions on how the Guidelines have been used by states and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to better protect education and save lives; how the SSD, by keeping schools safe, can be a tool to prevent other forms of grave violations, such as sexual violence and recruitment; ways in which education has been protected from attack in the Sahel region and the gendered impact of attacks; actions governments can take to better achieve accountability for attacks on education and justice for survivors; and the experiences and challenges faced by

ministries of defence in preventing and responding to attacks on education.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for their hospitality; the Governments of Argentina, Norway, and Spain, the African Union Commission, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack who, together, organised this successful conference; and the Education in Emergencies Working Group Nigeria (EiEWGN) who supported this outstanding three-day event. I am grateful to my colleagues, Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, for his participation at various conference events and for hosting the Welcome Reception; Dr. Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed, Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, for his support of the conference; and Major General Salihi Magashi (Rtd), Minister of Defence, for organising the side event, exhibition, and military tattoo. My sincere gratitude also to Mr. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, Minister of State for Education, and Arch Sonny S.T Echono, Permanent Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education, for their commitment in ensuring that the event was a success.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge the people behind the scenes who contributed to the success of this important event. I am very grateful for the dedicated team at the Federal Ministry and GCPEA. Special thanks to the panellists, moderators, rapporteurs, and the staff of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.

This report aims to capture the main activities and outcomes of the conference. By compiling this overview of the key topics and deliberations of the speakers and delegates, we shed light on how we can move from a global commitment to protect education to implementing practices that ensure all educators and students can teach, research, and learn without fear.

**H.E. Malam Adamu Adamu**  
Minister of Education  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Nigeria is fully committed to ensuring safe education for all students and educators. It was amongst the 37 countries that joined the Safe Schools Declaration when it first opened for endorsement in 2015. President Muhammadu Buhari, in December 2019, signed the SSD Guidelines Instrument of Ratification thereby demonstrating the country's commitment to uphold its principles. In line with the domestication of the SSD, the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) developed the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools as part of the government's commitment to safeguarding and protecting learners, teachers, and education personnel. The National SSD Plan of Action, 2021–2023, is a sign of the government's commitment to strengthening the protective role of education and improving accountability for attacks on educational facilities, students, and staff.

As part of our preparation for the Abuja Conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Ministry of Defence, and Federal Ministry of Education held national events to sensitise and increase participation at the Conference.

Delegates at the Conference discussed the theme “Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice” and worked to strengthen global cooperation and coordination in protecting education and deterring military use of schools and universities. State representatives convened with multilateral and civil society organisations (CSOs) to discuss prevention and response measures and exchange good practice in realising the right to education for all during armed conflict.

The Abuja Conference made clear that we can build a society in which all children and young people can study and learn in safety and educators and academics can teach and conduct research without the threat of violence. Nigeria will continue to engage with other member states, international organisations, and other relevant CSOs for the implementation of the conference recommendations. We call on all states to join us in endorsing and implementing the SSD and safeguarding the future of generations.

**H.E. Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Federal Republic of Nigeria





The global increase of attacks on education has made it necessary to develop a national agenda which sets out a three-year spending plan for financing and creating safe learning. The Ministry of Finance Budget and National Planning has taken proactive steps to consult with national and international stakeholders in order to chart a new course towards ensuring consistent financing to support education continuity in times of conflict, and also support survivors of attacks on education. A high-level forum entitled "Financing Safe Schools: Creating Safe Learning Communities" was held in April 2021, which highlighted our commitment to providing adequate funding for implementation of the National SSD Plan of Action 2021–2023.

The Ministry of Finance, Budget, and National Planning is looking to ensure adequate funding is provided through Federal Budgetary Allocation for the National SSD Plan of Action. It also commits to facilitating the allocation of funds in all relevant ministries for safe learning communities. States and local governments will also be encouraged to make budgetary allocations to help create safe learning communities for students and teachers, and rebuild confidence in the education system.

There must be strong synergy in tackling this menace of education under attack. I urge all stakeholders to collaboratively develop funding strategies and make commitments to develop a roadmap to ensure a whole-of-society approach in creating safe learning communities that will encourage children to return to school.

**H.E. Dr. Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed**

Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning  
Federal Republic of Nigeria

# Introduction

The Government of Nigeria, together with the Governments of Argentina, Norway, and Spain, the African Union Commission, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack hosted the 4th International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration on 25–27 October, in Abuja, and virtually. The previous conferences were held in Oslo, Norway, in 2015; Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2017; and Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in 2019. The aim of the Abuja Conference was to take stock and review progress in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict ("the Guidelines"), and to encourage commitment and action in protecting education from attack.

With the theme of **Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice**, the Conference was a forum for states, and multilateral and civil society organisations to present their strategies, progress, and challenges in making the promise of safe education into a reality, and to exchange and mutually learn from these experiences. The Conference was also an opportunity for states to hold each other accountable for advancing their commitment to implement the SSD. At the time of the Conference, 112 member states had endorsed the SSD, with many having had six years to put the Declaration commitments into practice. The Abuja conference therefore focused on identifying good practice in implementing key commitments of the Safe Schools Declaration and highlighting how this good practice could be strengthened and adapted to different contexts. The goal was to move beyond endorsement and expression of commitment to encourage states to accelerate implementation of the SSD.

Although the Abuja Conference had an international focus, because it was the first to be held on the African continent and in a region severely affected by attacks on education, the experiences of Nigeria and the Sahel region in addressing attacks on education were highlighted. Promising practices by the African Union itself, as well as countries across the continent and around the globe, were drawn upon to facilitate a comparative perspective and cross-country and cross-regional learning and exchange.

## Objectives:

The overarching goal was to strengthen implementation of the SSD by achieving the following specific objectives:

1. Share good practice in implementing key commitments in the Declaration to inspire other states to adapt the practice within their own context. In particular, to share promising practice in achieving the following SSD commitments: (a) Use the Guidelines and bring them into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate; (b) Seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict; (c) Investigate allegations of violations or applicable national and international law and, where appropriate, duly prosecute perpetrators; and (d) Provide assistance to survivors.
2. Forge global cooperation and strengthen coordination in protecting education and deterring military use of schools and universities by bringing together education, defence, justice and foreign affairs ministries, and multilateral and civil society organisations to discuss prevention and response measures.
3. Identify actions governments can take to better achieve accountability for attacks on education and justice for survivors by building and strengthening international and national legal mechanisms.

## Panels and Sessions:

**Panel 1: Use the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.** This panel examined how the Guidelines have been used by states and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to better protect education and save lives. Concrete examples of how military use of schools has been reduced as a result of implementing the Guidelines were highlighted.

**Panel 2: Ensure Continuity of Safe Education in Zones of Conflict.** This panel highlighted good practice in enabling safe education to continue during armed conflict. Distance learning and other alternative education programmes utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic were examined to explore how they might be applied to the context of attacks on education. In addition, the panel considered how the SSD—by keeping schools safe—can be a tool to prevent other forms of grave violations, such as recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence, and abductions, and how the SSD can better protect women and girls in conflict.

**Panel 3: The Way Forward: Investigating Allegations of Violations, Prosecuting Perpetrators, and Providing Assistance to Survivors.** To achieve justice for survivors of attacks on education, perpetrators must be prosecuted, but survivors must also receive services and support to enable them to recover. This panel addressed how international and national legal systems can address both of these elements, which ensure justice for persons and communities impacted by attacks on education, including through reparations.

In addition to the three panels, there were two sessions that did not focus on a particular commitment, but rather on the experiences of implementing the SSD more holistically: first, from a military perspective; and second, from a regional perspective:

**Session Hosted by the Nigerian Ministry of Defence.** The Nigerian armed forces explained how they are working to protect education in the northeast of Nigeria where schools are being targeted for attack by non-state armed groups. Other ministries of defence and armed forces were invited to discuss their own experiences and challenges in preventing and responding to attacks on education.

**Session on Reflections on Protecting Education from Attack in the Sahel.** This session included representatives from relevant ministries and multilateral and civil society organisations involved in preventing and responding to attacks on education in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Speakers presented the challenges faced and lessons learned for countries in other regions to draw on.

Alongside the main conference panels, and sessions, there was a **Welcome Reception** hosted by the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which included a virtual concert by the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflicts (Italy) to raise awareness about the safety and rights of children in conflict zones. A **Civil Society Organisation Event** led by the Education in Emergencies Working Group Nigeria (EiEWGN), Save the Children, and GCPEA provided first-hand accounts from individuals directly affected by attacks, and from activists in communities experiencing conflict. In addition, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (Nigeria), Save the Children International, and the Borno State Nigeria Children's Parliament held a **Children's Event** where children presented a manifesto with a call to action and 11 recommendations, and shared their experiences of attacks on education.

The Abuja Conference had more than 400 people from 27 States attend in-person, and there were 1,936 delegates from 124 states and international and civil society organisations who participated virtually. For more details on the conference, including the programme and video recordings of all presentations, please visit: [4th International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration](#).

# DAY 1

Monday, 25th  
October 2021

## I. Civil Society Event

*This opening event, organised by civil society, heard from individuals directly affected by attacks, and from activists in communities experiencing conflict first-hand. It put a spotlight on promising and innovative practices, as well as identifying gaps and challenges in implementing the SSD, taking stock of how the SSD is making a real difference in people's lives.*

The event was organised by the EiEWGN, Save the Children, and GCPEA. **Ms. Zama Neff, Co-chair of GCPEA and Executive Director of the Children's Rights Division at Human Rights Watch (HRW)**, moderated the session.

**Mr. Passy Amani, Education Sector Coordinator, Education in Emergencies Working Group Nigeria (EiEWGN)**, laid out the life-saving role of schools in northeast Nigeria. There, schools are more than a place to learn, they are also space to escape the danger of insecurity and hardship. Despite their incredible value, schools have been under persistent attack in recent years. Civil society and governments must work together to stem attacks on education, including by: scaling up financial support to secure schools; providing key interventions at school and at the community level through long-term budgeting and planning (public finance) to promote sustained education continuity. Community leaders, and traditional and religious groups all have a key role to play to make schools safe and secure. For example, they can establish and strengthen early warning systems, reinforce and scale up (beyond the Northeast) the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms, and work in strong collaboration with the community and security agencies in tackling attacks on schools. This should drive the accountability agenda of duty-bearers at key levels for the increased protection of learners, particularly girls, and those with disabilities. This accountability strategy must be prioritised in order to duly empower communities.

**Ms. Gayathri Butler, Director, Advocates Programme, Malala Fund**, highlighted GCPEA's report ***Education Under Attack 2020***, which recorded at least 93 countries (almost half of the countries in the world) being affected by attacks on education in 2015–2019. Two-thirds of the reported attacks were directed at schools. In addition, evidence points to the fact that girls' and women's experiences are different from those of boys and men. Across half the countries profiled, women and girls are targeted based on their gender in the form of sexual violence and violent repression of their education. In Nigeria, implementation of the SSD in Borno and Adamawa states has opened conversation about the challenges of safety in schools beyond the context of conflict. Communities are discussing gender-based violence and protecting girls from natural and everyday hazards which contribute to insecurity and violence. The conference is an opportunity to accelerate efforts in implementing the SSD.

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Promises are not enough—girls around the world are still choosing between safety and schools.

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*Ms. Gayathri Butler, Director, Advocates Programme, Malala Fund*

**Ms. Joy Bishara, Survivor, Nigeria**, narrated the events of 14 April 2014, when Boko Haram attacked Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, Nigeria. The non-state armed group gave them the option of being killed or getting in the trucks. When the trucks were driving away, she realised that she was moving farther away from her family and might never see them again. She managed to get away as one of the cars broke down and some of the abductors went to assist. In that moment, she, and a couple of her classmates, made the decision to jump off the truck and escape. Ms. Bishara made a plea to governments to protect and make schools safe so that no-one would go through what she did.

**Mr. Ahmad Turki Arafat, Child Rights Activist, Hurras Network, Syria**, explained that when the Syrian conflict started, schools were closed. In the schools that have remained open, the environment is not conducive to learning due to the ongoing conflict. Schools should be safe and children should not be caught up in hostilities.

**Ms. Paola, 14-year-old Child Rights Activist, "Colombia must endorse the SSD"**, spoke about hearing gunshots and shelling whilst in school. Students closed their windows and blocked the doors with their tables. A bomb broke a window. The Children's Manifesto is a key document outlining children's demands to governments about making schools safe. States that have not endorsed the Declaration must do so.

**Ms. Deisy Apiricio, Student and Activist, Colombia**, stated that despite an agreement between the government and armed groups, the situation is getting worse. For example, there are increased attacks on schools and occupation of schools by armed groups, which means that some students are unable to attend. "Colombia must endorse the SSD."

**H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security**, was unequivocal that the response to attacks on education must be universal, collective, in-depth, and continent-wide. The AU has taken steps in that direction by promoting the new AU Doctrine on Peace Operations. In Somalia the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Central African Republic, and Mozambique, policymakers and the AU Peace Support Operators have been sensitised on peace education, which is incorporated in regular trainings. With consistency and support from the leaders of member states and those who have endorsed the SSD, implementation of the AU Doctrine on Peace Operations can be deployed to make a difference. The AU is in partnership with the UN and all leading intergovernmental agencies to make such change happen, centered on peace education.

**Ms. Yasmine Sherif, Director, Education Cannot Wait**, noted that the SSD reminds governments and signatories of actions that can be taken in forms of legal and physical protection. In addition, the SSD offers concrete guidance and measures on the behaviour of armed forces, armed groups, and non-state actors. Having robust data ensures an understanding of the situation, the ability to provide assistance to survivors, and helps hold perpetrators accountable. SSD implementation encourages compliance, investigations, and prosecutions for violations. The impact of the SSD for education practitioners translates into receiving support and investments to ensure that their work is conflict-sensitive. In Syria, ECW has supported a system of procedures across the education sector that allows actors to respond within 12 hours of an attack. There should be accountability and justice for attacking innocent children and those who go to school to learn and be productive, in the middle of conflict.

**Ms. Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children International (SCI)**, highlighted that translating the SSD into action requires engagement from governments, military, non-state actors, community members, teachers, and children themselves. SCI's work includes collaborating with teachers, community members, and children to protect schools from attack. Practical measures include children organising themselves at the school level, in communities with teachers and parents, to create a safe learning environment in the midst of conflict. Schools can be safer for children if there is commitment to changed behaviour. For example, training and dialogue is important to implementation of *The Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict*, which is why SCI supports training armed forces on its implementation. Documenting and reporting attacks on education allows us to understand the scale of the challenge and hold perpetrators to account. Moving forward, it is important to advocate for universal endorsement of the SSD by all states. The SSD provides a common framework for CSOs to work with children, schools, local communities, decision makers, and armed groups.

## II. Welcome Reception

In the evening, the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a Welcome Reception and recognised delegates from the following newly endorsing states: Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Gambia, Guatemala, Maldives, Moldova, Morocco, Nicaragua, Palau, Samoa, Senegal, and Seychelles. The ambassadors of Benin and Gambia in Nigeria were also formally recognised.

**H.E. Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, welcomed delegates to the reception and shared that Nigeria is the first African country to host the SSD conference, which demonstrates the country's commitment to safe schools.

### Goodwill Messages

**H.E. Dr. Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed, Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, stated that the ministry is committed to financing safe schools by facilitating the allocation of funds in all related Nigerian ministries during the budgeting process. She urged the global community to collaboratively develop funding strategies and make commitments to develop a roadmap to ensure a holistic approach to creating safe learning communities that will encourage children to return to school. The private sector will also play a vital role in supporting the drive to finance safe schools globally.

**Arch Sonny S.T Echono, Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, focused on the need for every UN member state to be committed to the SSD by ensuring effective implementation in their various contexts. He reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to the SSD and its Guidelines to safeguard education.

**Ms. Zama Neff, Co-chair, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, noted that the conference is unique as it is the first held on the African continent. Nigeria and neighbouring countries are deeply impacted by attacks on education. The Abuja Conference is also different from previous conferences as it is conducted in a hybrid format which allows global engagement and incredible discussions by those affected directly—teachers and students. In addition, the conference is taking place when an overwhelming

majority of countries have signed the SSD. However, attacks on education rose globally by one-third in 2020 in the context of a global pandemic. We need to work harder and mobilise others to join us and demand accountability for attacks on education.

### Keynote Speech

**Ms. Helen Grant MP, UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Girls' Education**, reinforced that education is a human right and essential to building stable communities, greater understanding and equal opportunities, and called for universalization of the Safe Schools Declaration. There were more than 11,000 attacks on education between 2015 and 2019, harming 22,000 learners and educators in 93 countries. Girls are disproportionately affected - girls who reside in conflict zones are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than girls who do not. Out of school, girls are at greater risk of violence, sexual abuse, forced marriage, child marriage, and human trafficking, thus creating a real risk of a "lost generation" of girls. The Special Envoy reinforced the need for the international community to work together to stop this from happening. She stressed that we must move from the endorsement stage to implementation of the SSD, and that implementation must be gender-responsive. As a result, the UK has embarked on embedding the SSD in the girls' education campaign. The international community should work together to ensure that Education Cannot Wait is fully resourced as it provides emergency and long-term support to ensure that education continues in crisis. The SSD conference is an opportunity to advance the protection of education on the global agenda as it provides the framework. Governments must make good on their commitments to the SSD to better protect children affected by conflict.

### Virtual Concert

**H.E. Dr. Stefano Pontesilli, Ambassador of Italy in Abuja, represented by Mr. Tarek Chazli, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Italy in Nigeria**, introduced the Universities Network for Children in Armed Conflicts, and the Virtual Concert, which took place at the CPM Music Institute, Milan, Italy. The concert was aimed at raising awareness on education as the best instrument to guarantee a better future for children living in situations of armed conflict.

*Photo: H.E. Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria with representatives of H.E. Mrs. Paulette Marcelline Adjovi-Yekpe, Ambassador of Benin in Abuja and H.E. Mr. Mohamadou Musa Njie, High Commissioner of Gambia to Nigeria*



## DAY 2

Tuesday, 26TH  
October 2021

# I. Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony welcomed participants to the 4th International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, the first on the African continent, and the first held virtually, enabling a truly global audience to join. Beginning with the voices of children reminding governments of their obligations to protect their education, and the ceremony included welcome, opening, and good-will messages from states, the United Nations, and civil society dignitaries. The ceremony concluded with a keynote address by H.E. President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria, represented by his Chief of Staff.

The second day began with a video entitled “Voices of Children”, created by GCPEA and Save the Children Norway. The video presented children from Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Palestine, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen speaking about their experiences and the importance of governments implementing the SSD.

**Ms. Arit Okpo, Host, CNN African Voices Changemakers (Master of Ceremonies)**, officially opened the Conference. The **Borno Children's Parliament**, represented by **Rt Hon. Ibrahim Zana Sunoma**, 13-years-old, called on world leaders to endorse and implement the SSD for the safety and wellbeing of children. **Hon. Madina Abdulkadri, Member, Borno State Children's Parliament (Dikwa) and Save the Children Girl Champion**, 15-years-old, recited her poem “Child in Conflict.” She made a plea to stop the war on children, emphasised that there is no peace when children are at war, and noted that decisions should be made with children so that their voices can be heard. She ended by highlighting that educating children “reserves a better tomorrow for the nation.”

## Welcome Address

In his welcome speech, **H.E. Malam Adamu Adamu, Minister of Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, represented by **H.E. Mr. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, Minister of State for Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, highlighted that the Conference is the first to be held on the African continent and is being hosted by Nigeria due to the prevailing challenges facing the education sector, particularly the situation of insecurity—including attacks on education by insurgents and bandits—which is fast spreading to all the states in the country. He expressed optimism that in the course of the conference, Nigeria would learn from good practice in other states and be better able to address these attacks.

## Opening Remarks

**H.E. Ms. Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway**, welcomed African leadership and engagement on the Safe Schools issue demonstrated by the high number of SSD endorsements from African countries. The political commitment to protect education from attack and military use must be followed by practical implementation. Schools and universities are safer in areas where the Declaration has been implemented. Children and young people are safer when schools and universities are not used

for military purposes. The SSD makes it possible for education to continue during armed conflict. Local and international partnerships are crucial to succeed. To that end, Norway is launching a network platform at the Abuja Conference to facilitate cooperation and implementation of the SSD. Ensuring safe and equal access to education is a priority. Attention to the gender dimension is essential to properly understand the impact of conflict on communities and individuals. Norway gives priority to protection of education and children in its humanitarian partnerships, development cooperation, through the UN and more. In the United Nations Security Council, Norway works to strengthen compliance with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians and civilian objects. Norway addresses attacks on education in debates, mandates, and resolutions.

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The Children's Manifesto launched at the Abuja Conference is a powerful statement written by more than 300 children in conflict situations, describing how they live in fear. The children call on states to protect their right to education and prevent attacks and military use of schools and universities. We have a duty to heed that call and take action to put the declaration into practice.

*H.E. Ms. Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Norway*

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**H.E. Mr. José Manuel Albares Bueno, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Spain**, spoke about the 3rd International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration hosted by Spain in Palma de Mallorca in 2019, which focused on the gendered impact of attacks on education and improving monitoring and reporting

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Our commitment is firm and unequivocal. Be sure that Spain will continue contributing to the protection of education. We must be united to protect our future from attacks. We will do our part. We must work for the universalisation of the Declaration. ”

*H.E. Mr José Manuel Albares Bueno, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Spain*

of attacks on education. In 2021, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), in collaboration with GCPEA, conducted an online training for 80 civilians and military personnel from 20 endorsing countries on the practical application of the Guidelines. Spain is also rebuilding schools in Lebanon and Honduras and now finalising its first Strategy for Humanitarian Diplomacy, a pioneering exercise, to move the Safe Schools Declaration agenda forward as one of its priorities across all segments of the government. that Spain's commitment to the SSD is firm and unequivocal, and that they will continue contributing to the protection of education and universalisation of the Declaration.

## Goodwill Message

**Mr. Ziauddin Yousafzai, Co-founder, Malala Fund**, reflected on his role as a teacher, a father and a girls' education advocate and why protection of education is close to his heart. He shared that when terrorists took over where he lived, they limited curricula and bombed schools. They attacked his daughter, Malala, on her school bus because she spoke out for every girl's right to learn. He noted that education champions funded by the Malala Fund can play an important role in implementing the SSD in countries such as Nigeria.

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And so as you come together to discuss how to implement the Declaration, Malala Fund and I recommit to working with you—governments and civil society partners—to protect education from attack. I urge all governments in attendance today to commit to signing the Safe Schools Declaration and ensure its implementation. Only then will we create a world where every child can safely learn and lead.

*Mr Ziauddin Yousafzai, Co-founder, Malala Fund*

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**Ms. Audrey Azoulay, Director-General, UNESCO**, commended the 112 UN member states that had endorsed the SSD, the first intergovernmental political agreement to protect schools from consequences of armed conflict, for supporting these universal values. She noted that everyone has the right to education and warned that attacks on schools were a despicable crime, attacking the very future of humanity. Recognising progresses made, she called on states to do more, and emphasised the importance of making the Declaration a reality by translating its principles and mechanisms into national law. Reflecting on the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, which took place on 9 September 2021, she stressed the need for better data on these crimes on education to reinforce actions to protect the right to education, because it is the right upon which all other rights are built.

**Ms. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF**, noted that since 2005, the United Nations has verified over a quarter of a million grave rights violations against children during conflict. In 2020, this included 535 verified attacks on schools—a shocking increase of 17 percent compared to 2019. Education has become even more dangerous for children living in conflict situations. She called on states to adopt the Safe Schools Declaration and for all who have adopted it to enact legislation to fully implement its commitments.

**Mr. David Beckham, OBE and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador**, was introduced by **Ms. Henrietta Fore**, and reiterated that education is not only a right for every child, it is also a pathway to a better, brighter, and more peaceful future for a generation of children growing up under the shadow of war.

## Keynote Address

The keynote address was delivered by **H.E. President Mohammed Buhari, GCFR, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, represented by the **Chief of Staff, Professor Ibrahim Gambari**. Professor Gambari noted the recent development in Nigerian schools of learners being abducted by terrorist groups. This has worsened the challenges already existing in the education sector, where over 12 million Nigerian children are out of school. The Government will not relent until schools are totally safe for learners.

The Government has the primary responsibility for protecting and ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels for all learners, especially those in vulnerable situations. This explains why Nigeria was part of the first group of 37 countries that endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration on 29 May 2015. The Nigerian Government is highly committed to prioritising safety in schools to protect investments in the education sector.

Hosting the Abuja Conference is a great opportunity to share Nigeria's good practices in implementing the SSD. Nigeria has been able to systematically develop strategies and mechanisms to protect education with the help of the SSD framework. The developed and approved policy on “Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools” will serve as a response document to the needs of children and the violence that affects them in and around schools. In addition, Nigeria has identified and put mechanisms in place to address all kinds of hazards that affect the wellbeing of learners, teachers, and the school community, to ensure the safety and security of schools in Nigeria. The developed “Minimum Standards for Safe Schools” will communicate the mechanisms to be put in place by all schools to overcome dangers and to ensure the continuation of schooling at all times. Also, the newly-developed Safe Schools Declaration Trainer's Guide For Nigerian Security Agencies and Human Rights Organisations and Safe Schools Declaration Participants' Manual for the Training of Nigerian Security Agencies and Human Rights Organisations are currently being used to facilitate training on the protection of education.

Endorsing the SSD has charted a practical pathway in safeguarding the right to education. Nigeria therefore urges the remaining UN member states to quickly endorse the Declaration in course of this Conference, to make all learning institutions safe abodes for learners.

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Let me therefore assure you that the Government, relevant security agencies, Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria (EiEWGN), and all the relevant stakeholders will continue to work for the promotion of the objectives of this Conference, to end attacks on education and to ensure a safe and enabling learning environment.

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*H.E. President Mohammed Buhari, GCFR, Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria represented by the Chief of Staff, Professor Ibrahim Gambari.*

## II. Children's Event

A Children's Event was organised by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Save the Children International.

**The Borno State Children's Parliament** demonstrated the impact of attacks on education on their lives through presentations by seven members of the parliament, including Aisha, a visually impaired girl who represents children with disabilities. Implementation of the SSD and the Guidelines has ensured the continuity of schooling against all odds in Borno state, they said. Federal and state governments should adequately secure schools, provide a conducive learning environment, ensure gender equity in education, provide inclusive education for children with disabilities, and integrate basic education into the Tsangaya schools.

**H.E. Dame Pauline Tallen, Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development**, represented by **Mr. Alli Madugu, Director, Child Development**, appreciated the Children's Parliament for their innovative presentation. The ministry's mandate is on the gendered impact of attacks on education. The ministry has been implementing the SSD commitment by providing assistance to survivors through its social

protection programme. This includes ensuring psycho-social support for affected children and women. The ministry has a database that collects data and monitors responses to gender-based violence in the country, but more support is needed from partners to expand the database to include survivors of attacks on education. The ministry will work more closely with the Federal Ministry of Education to support conflict-affected girls' rehabilitation through education and skills acquisition.

**Children from Burkina Faso, Colombia, Guatemala and Palestine**, presented a statement from the Children's Manifesto. Leading up to the Abuja Conference, Save the Children consulted with 300 children in ten countries, including Nigeria, Ukraine, Colombia and Yemen, on what education means to them, what impact the SSD has had, and what recommendations they would give global leaders. The consultations resulted in a Children's Manifesto, written by the children themselves, outlining the risks they are exposed to in and around schools, and offering 11 concrete recommendations (included in the recommendations section of this report) and several calls to action.

*Photo: Borno State Children's Parliament engaging with H.E. Mr. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, Minister of State for Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria.*



### III. Ministries of Defence Experiences Protecting Education: Challenges And Responses

Hosted by the Nigerian Armed Forces, this session explored how the military is working to protect education in the northeast of the country where schools are being targeted for attack by non-state armed groups. Military experts from the Ukraine and the African Union joined the discussion to explore their own practical experiences and challenges in preventing and responding to attacks on education in conflict zones.

The session opened with a documentary by the Nigerian military which highlighted their activities to safeguard education in the northeast of the country. **Ms. Zama Neff, Co-chair, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, moderated the session and posed questions about the challenges and successes, and how the SSD Guidelines have contributed to ensure that education is protected in diverse contexts. The Nigerian military hosted an exhibition which featured a school that had been attacked and a prototype of a safe school. The session came to a close with a musical performance by the renowned Nigerian military tattoo (band).

**H.E. Major General Salihi Magashi (Rtd), Minister of Defence, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, represented by **General Lucky Irabor, Chief of Defence Staff**, outlined the military's activities in the northeast, including deployment of military teachers to support education continuity, development of the SSD security manual for Nigerian security agencies and human rights organisations, and protection of schools to ensure examinations took place in 2020 for the first time in six years in Chibok since the abductions by Boko Haram. The military out of necessity, do occupy schools to protect the infrastructure from non-state armed groups.

**H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, African Union**, Peace and Security Council, represented by **Mr. Zinurine Alghali, Chief of Unit, Policy Development Unit, for Political Affairs, Peace and Security**, highlighted the role of the African Union in advancing the SSD by adopting the Doctrine on Peace Support Operations, which includes language against using schools for military purposes. Child protection advisors should be included as part of military and peacekeeping operations in order to strengthen protection and prevent violations against children.

**Colonel Volodymyr Liamzin, Deputy Chief of CIMIC Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Ukraine**, noted that the Armed Forces of Ukraine is carrying out an awareness-building campaign on banning the participation of children in hostilities and armed conflict. The Armed Forces of Ukraine is also being systematically trained in international humanitarian law and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, in cooperation with international organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children Ukraine, and the Center for the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (CIVIC). This work will be continued.

Taking into account the provisions of the Declaration, as well as the Guidelines, the units of the joint forces in Eastern Ukraine are located in a way to ensure the security of the civilian population, including minimising the proximity of the military to educational institutions. Units of the joint forces are located as far as possible from educational institutions. At the same time, shellings, which are regularly carried out by the armed forces of the Russian Federation, put both the personnel of the joint forces and the civilian population (including educational institutions) living in the war zone in constant danger. The Armed Forces of Ukraine will support the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the, which was adopted relatively recently.

“ One of the top steps to improve the protection of civilians is to ensure the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. ”

*Colonel Volodymyr Liamzin, Deputy Chief of CIMIC Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, Ukraine*

### IV. Panel 1: Using The Guidelines For Protecting Schools And Universities From Military Use During Armed Conflict

*By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, states commit to endorsing and using the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and to bringing them into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate. In this panel, GCPEA shared data showing an overall reduction of military use in states that were early endorsers of the Safe Schools Declaration. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations discussed its ban on using schools for military purposes and its impact. Countries that have taken concrete steps to implement the Guidelines in their legislation, policies, military doctrine, or practice offered insight on how they have contributed to saving lives and protecting the right to education and how their good practice can be replicated in other contexts.*

This panel session was moderated by **H.E Amb. Federico Villega, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the International Organisations in Geneva.**

**Dr. Jerome Marston and Dr. Marika Tsolakis, Senior Researchers, GCPEA**, outlined GCPEA's research finding that over 20 countries were affected by military use of educational facilities in 2020, and highlighted the risks involved when armed forces and non-state armed groups occupy schools and use them as bases, barracks, or for other military purposes. Military use of schools and universities has serious impacts, including restrictions on the right to education and producing unsafe learning environments; occupation puts students and educators at risk of sexual violence and forced recruitment and can last for hours, days, months, or even years. In the Central African Republic, for example, the UN reported in 2020 that 9,000 children were deprived of education due to 13 cases of school occupation and attacks by armed groups. However, Dr. Marston and Dr. Tsolakis also pointed to emerging evidence that the SSD is working between 2015 and 2020, among the 13 countries that experienced military use and endorsed the SSD in 2015 and 2016, military use of schools and universities declined by more than half (decreasing from over 180 reported incidents to around 70 incidents).

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GCPEA found that between 2015 and 2020, military use of schools and universities dropped from over 180 reported incidents to some 70 incidents among the 13 countries that experienced military use and signed the declaration in the first two years it was open for endorsement. ”

*Dr. Jerome Marston, Senior Researcher, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)*

Photo: The Nigerian Army Brigade of Guards perform outdoors at the Abuja conference.



**Mr. Charles Fomunyam, Child Protection Adviser, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)**, gave an overview of the 2015 MINUSCA directive that prohibits MINUSCA peacekeeping forces from using schools and universities. Prior to the arrival of MINUSCA, AU troops were using schools as bases at the invitation of the state authorities. As the troops were reintegrated into MINUSCA, they had to abide by the directive. This was based on the premise that if UN troops are occupying schools, then the UN will have no moral authority to ask armed groups not to occupy schools. Resolutions can be signed but if not implemented on the ground, they cannot be effective. Since the 2015 directive, no MINUSCA troop, police force, or military has occupied schools. The directive is also an advocacy tool to engage with armed groups. An example of good practice is that no checkpoint by an armed group or military has been set up within 500 metres of a school. In 2020, CAR passed legislation criminalising the use of schools for military purposes and MINUSCA is following up on implementation. One of the ways to protect schools is by strengthening coordination with child protection actors so that when forces vacate a school, everything is done to ensure that the school is functional. A non-functional school in a village means that militaries that come across it may occupy it.

**Mr. Anis Chouchane, Child Protection Officer, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations**, noted that the protection of children in armed conflict is at the core of UN Peace Operations. The UN Infantry Battalion Manual (2012, updated in 2020) specifies that schools shall not be used by the military in their operations. The explicit ban on the use of schools for military purposes is reflected in the joint DPO-DPPA-DOS “2017 Child Protection Policy”, where the military use of schools is identified as a key child protection concern. The policy recognises the adverse impact of the use of schools for military purposes; in particular, its effects on the safety of children and education personnel, the civilian nature of schools, and the right to education. The Child Protection DPO team and the Swedish Armed Forces International Center (SWEDINT) have collaborated in organising a training course on the UN Specialised Training Materials for the Military on Child Protection. Some successes with SWEDINT include trainings on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide effective advocacy and dialogue with Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) to protect children and prevent attacks on schools in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; support to national coordination mechanisms and relevant child protection actors to ensure the safe reopening of schools in Mali; and issuance of a directive prohibiting parties to the conflict from using a school or university in the Central African Republic.

**Ms. Tabitha Bonney, Senior Lawyer, Operational and International Humanitarian Law Team, Ministry of Defence Central Legal Services, United Kingdom**, provided detailed information about the explicit protection of educational institutions in the UK in both its manual on law of armed conflict and in its procedures on its approach to armed conflict. The UK presumes that

objects normally used for civilian purposes, including schools, are not to be for military use. If there is doubt to the status of a military target, there needs to be reliable information and not merely suspicion in order to justify an attack. Each theatre of operations has an additional authorities’ framework, including rules of engagement, which take into account the urban environment and civilian infrastructure. These specific instructions balance the achievement of a military objective with the UK’s overall objective of establishing peace and security in the area, and the recognition of schools is key to that overall objective. Within the UK’s manual, educational institutions are often intertwined with the rules protecting cultural property, which prohibits the use of such property which is likely to expose that property to destruction or damage in armed conflict, unless there is no feasible alternative.

The UK has a holistic approach to protecting civilians and youth, which encompasses the protection of schools, and considers both the particular and cumulative impact of the SSD and Guidelines, alongside other measures such as women, peace, and security; Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA); human trafficking; and the protection of cultural property. The country recognises that protecting children from the effects of armed conflict is both the moral, legal, and strategic imperative, and an essential element to break the cycle of violence. The Ministry of Defence is currently updating its human security guidelines. The SSD is an important measure in acting as a force for good.

**Ms. Beatriz Sierra Santos, Senior Advisor at the Humanitarian Action Office, Spanish Development Cooperation Agency (AECID)**, highlighted how Spain is supporting implementation of the SSD and the Guidelines specifically. In May 2019, the Government of Spain, with the support of the Governments of Argentina and Norway and GCPEA, hosted the 3rd International Conference on Safe Schools, focused on good practices and opportunities for future cooperation in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration. At the conference, Spain announced the launch of a technical cooperation and training programme that would focus on the application of the Guidelines and their integration into regulatory and operational frameworks. The first international seminar was held virtually during February and March 2021 and brought together over 90 representatives from ministries of defence, education, and foreign affairs from 20 countries. Through a series of presentations, practical exercises, and discussions, participants were trained on prevention, data collection, and accountability for attacks on education, including examining the different ways that boys and men, and girls and women, are affected by attacks. During the training, the following recommendations on how to strengthen implementation of the Declaration were highlighted: (1) foster a multi-stakeholder approach (the role of state actors—military and civilian bodies—non-state armed groups, religious leaders, civil society) must be integrated into the education protection strategies; (2) improve awareness, information sharing, and data collection to prevent and mitigate the effect of attacks on education; and (3) strengthen accountability for attacks on education. In 2022, Spain will roll out a second global training on the Safe Schools Declaration for endorsing states.

## DAY 3

Wednesday, 27th  
October, 2021

### I. Discussion: Urging Non-State Armed Groups To Protect Education

*Geneva Call engages with non-state armed groups to encourage respect for international humanitarian norms and principles. The Director-General, Mr. Alain Déléroz, shared successes and challenges in working with non-state armed groups to end attacks on education, and limit use of schools for military purposes, including by implementing the Guidelines.*

**Mr. Alain Déléroz, Director-General, Geneva Call**, gave an overview of ways to engage armed non-State actors (ANSAs) on the protection of education. Geneva Call has discussed this with more than 80 ANSAs, and 29 of them have signed its Deed of Commitment, thus committing to ensure that children have access to education, and to avoid using schools, or premises primarily used by children, for military purposes. Challenges include gaining access to ANSAs—which is often a security risk—and legislation on counterterrorism in various states, which represents a major difficulty for humanitarian actors working to increase the protection of individuals in conflict areas through directly engaging ANSAs. Legislation on counterterrorism should indeed have a clause exempting humanitarian actors who require access to these groups. The discussion concluded with a call for state representatives to show good examples of their armed forces implementing the SSD and its *Guidelines*.

### II. Panel 2: Ensure Continuity Of Education In Zones Of Conflict

*The SSD includes a commitment to seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict. This panel explored how this commitment has been put into practice, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic where many schools across the globe were closed and alternative measures such as distance learning were put in place. It considered how these measures can be extended to children in armed conflict, even when the pandemic is over. Safe education can also contribute to preventing other forms of grave violations against children, such as recruitment, sexual violence, and abductions. The panellists reflected on how the SSD, a tool for ensuring safe education, can contribute to reducing these other grave violations, especially against women and girls.*

The panel was moderated by **Ms. Cathrine Andersen, Special Representative for Protection of Civilians, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.

**H.E. Ms. Marina Sereni, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy**, provided insight on Italy's National Action Plan 2020–2024 for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, which incorporates the SSD principles. Continued access to schools within the context of an enduring conflict is a powerful instrument to promote peace and provide opportunity to young people. School closures have devastating impacts on conflict-affected children and particularly girls, as they are more exposed to risks of abuse, sexual violence, and school dropout, thereby drastically undermining their chances of a better future. All of this points to the need to develop a gender specific component to the implementation framework considering Italy's specific commitment to children born in armed conflict. The presence of well-integrated women personnel amongst peacekeeping troops brings many benefits, including helping in accessing communities and creating relationships of trust with local populations. Italy commits to universal endorsement of the SSD and, above all, to ending violations and abuse of children in conflict. This is a moral imperative and an essential tool to promote future peace and prevent further wars.

**H.E. Dr. Pauline Nalova Lyonga, Minister for Secondary Education, Cameroon**, provided examples of how the ministry supported education during conflict and COVID-19. She shared how the country viewed distance learning programmes such as TV, radio, and online resources. The distance education centre was opened for the first time in Yaounde for secondary students. This also contributed to the digitization of learning and increased investments in new ways of learning, which have enhanced the quality of learning. This has been evident in the attainment levels in national examinations. Distance education complements traditional ways of learning, provides offline resources, and is vital for the continuation of education and protection of learners and teachers in crisis contexts. The roles of communities are important in ensuring education continuity, but governments and stakeholders must monitor the curriculum to ensure that it promotes peace, not conflict. The capacity of teachers and school administrators must be strengthened to ensure the safety of children while in school; deliberate steps must be taken for children to return to school safely; and partnerships with state and non-state actors are needed to implement the SSD Guidelines.

**Dr. Andreas Snildal, Senior Programme Officer, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**, explained that, as the only UN agency with a mandate in higher education, UNESCO has a particular responsibility to promote the continuity of higher education in zones of conflict. Higher education is important, beyond study programmes, for the development and fulfilment of societies. Universities might be the only entities in society that contribute to the fulfillment of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not just SDG 4 on quality education. University closures and attacks on higher education can inflict irreparable damage on societies. UNESCO supports governments in protecting higher education institutions through the implementation and monitoring of normative instruments, such as the 1997 recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel. It supports national governments by providing policy advice and capacity building to ensure equitable and quality education in emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted access to safe and quality higher education and demonstrated the potential for new digital and remote learning opportunities, but this does not free the world from the obligation to protect the physical integrity of higher education institutions in conflict zones.

**Ms. Charlotte Berquin, Education Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for West & Central Africa (WCA)**, highlighted opportunities for education for 4.5 million refugee and displaced children who are at risk of attacks on education in WCA. The agency ensures education continuity by: building the reception and teaching capacities of schools in areas hosting displaced populations and systematising measures to prevent attacks on education; supporting Ministries of Education to maintain the continuity of education for refugee and displaced learners through the recognition of prior learning and the implementation of specific measures (distance education, accelerated education programmes, and flexible learning opportunities for those who cannot re-enter the formal system); and creation of protective and inclusive learning environments for all learners.

In Chad, during the school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR assisted camp teachers to provide homework and tutoring for 25,000 refugee students in exam classes. In Niger, UNHCR funded a catch-up programme implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council for

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UNHCR views education as an essential protection tool in displacement contexts and therefore makes every effort to ensure a return to school as quickly as possible and ideally within three months of displacement. ”

*Ms. Charlotte Berquin, Education Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for West & Central Africa*

nearly 3,000 newly arrived refugee and host children to support their reintegration in the national education system. In 2021, UNHCR financially supported more than 2,000 teachers in refugee reception areas and trained more than 2,510 teachers in emergency education, child protection, and psychosocial support in seven countries in the region. More financial support is still urgently needed for education in emergencies and protracted crises, given the exponential needs of the sector. This requires investment in public education infrastructure, support for teachers and targeted assistance for refugee and displaced children and youth to ensure that education plays its protective role.

**Ms. Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children International (SCI)**, provided examples of how programmes developed during the pandemic can be used to ensure education for children out of school due to armed conflict. There is an undeniable link between efforts that encourage children to continue their education and reduction in violations of their rights. SCI has been creating new ways of working to ensure effective distance learning programmes that keep children safe and prepare for their return to school. The Safe Schools programming takes an all-hazards approach to respond to threats that children face in and around schools, such as violence, armed conflict, natural dangers, and everyday hazards. This programming is being implemented with the support of local communities in countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Ukraine, Syria, and Nigeria.

**Mr. Graham Lang, Chief of Education, Education Cannot Wait (ECW)**, explained that ECW is a UN fund dedicated to education during emergencies and protracted crises. One of its objectives is to reposition education from the margins of humanitarian response to the centre, along with other life-saving interventions such as health and food security. Some challenges to this objective include the use of schools as weapons by non-state armed groups to displace and threaten communities, liberate land, and gain access to local resources. All of this results in school closures and higher drop-out rates, particularly for girls. In West and Central Africa, fewer girls are in school than ten years ago due to attacks on education. It is important to reach the most vulnerable learners, such as those with disabilities. Attacks on education have a severe impact on children's physical and mental health. Over half of children in Central Sahel do not feel safe in school and more than 60 percent have no hope for the future. Psychosocial support is key for children and their learning. Accelerated education programmes to catch up on lost time, and low-tech distance education when there is an absence of physical infrastructure, are important for this support. States should develop SSD action plans that include psychosocial support and recognise the needs of children with disabilities.

### III. Reflections on Protecting Education From Attack in the Sahel Region

*An alarming number of attacks on education in the Sahel region have been recorded in recent years. In 2020, GCPEA collected over 600 reported incidents of attacks on education in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Since 2020, over 1,400 Nigerian students and educators have reportedly been abducted, arrested, injured, or killed. At the same time, these countries have made significant progress in implementing the Safe Schools Declaration through national action plans, legislation, and regional coordination mechanisms. This session discussed the measures being put in place to protect education in some of the most challenging of circumstances.*

*The panel was moderated by Mrs. Cristina Gutierrez, Head of the Humanitarian Action Office, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Spain.*

The panel began with a [video](#) entitled “Protecting Education in the Sahel Region”, created by Plan International on behalf of the Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG) and partners. The video highlighted implementation of the SSD in Nigeria and the impact of attacks on education on adolescent girls.

**Mrs. Cristina Gutierrez** asked each speaker to provide concrete steps taken to respond to attacks on education and to highlight how partnerships and regional collaboration can be strengthened to ensure safe education in the Sahel region.

**H.E. Mr. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, Minister of State for Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, shared how the Nigerian government implemented the SSD Action Plan (2018–2020) entitled “Mainstreaming and Implementation of the SSD Laws and Policies in Nigeria”. The Plan provided the framework for ensuring coordinated action, collective responsibility, and shared accountability of all stakeholders to make every school and learning center a safe, secure, enabling environment for universal access and quality learning outcomes for all children, youth, and adolescents. This led to the development of the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools, the signing of the SSD and Guidelines by H.E. President Muhammadu Buhari, training documents on the minimum standards for safe schools, and manuals for security agencies and human rights institutions. The Plan of Action 2021–2023 is focused on implementation at the school and community levels, which means that more sensitisation and advocacy is needed to get buy-in.

Some of the current challenges are: the multiplicity and diversity of armed groups and militias; the increase in areas affected by insecurity; the ever-growing increase in attacks on schools; the increase in number of schools closed (1,684 in July 2021 with 505,200 children deprived of their right to education and 10,104 unmotivated teachers); the persistence of grave violations against children, especially girls; and insufficient financial resources to carry out all planned activities. The Sahel platform brings together Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as the perfect illustration of regional collaboration as it enables them to: meet periodically and strengthen their multiple links; share difficulties encountered in the field; draw inspiration from each other's successes; avoid practices that have given rise to difficulties; and support each other technically.

**Mr. Clement Traore, Education Programme Advisor, Plan International Burkina Faso**, presented an overview of the humanitarian response in Burkina Faso where more than 300,000 students are affected by school closings, nearly half of them girls. Only 31% of displaced girls attend school, while this rate is 53% for non-displaced girls in the same areas. These figures are the consequence of a growing number of school dropouts, early and forced marriages, gender violence and discrimination, and trauma suffered most severely by girls and caused by a climate of insecurity and attacks on education. To address this situation, Plan International works with children, particularly young girls, to ensure the continuity of education through programmes that aim at facilitating remote learning, re-enrollment for pregnant girls, sexual health education lessons, and capacity building for teachers to know how to effectively deal with these situations. Plan International is also working in collaboration with the Joining Forces Coalition and UNICEF on a digital campaign for implementing the SSD at the regional level. Finally, Plan International makes the following recommendations: to include girls' and youth organisations in decision-making and strategic planning processes; and to include an action plan for implementing the SSD, prioritising gender, in the new national education strategy for 2022–2026, allocating it at least 30% of the education budget.

**H.E. Dr. Rabiou Ousman, Minister of National Education, Republic of Niger**, shared ways Niger is promoting the SSD. This includes organising meetings with governors of the region affected by insecurity in order to ensure continuity of public services and education; relocation of students to secure environments; and radio programming for distance learning. He also outlined the country's specific project on Sahel women and how inclusion of women in decision-making makes a difference in the facilitation of safe education. At the national level, partnerships for the protection of education include a review of school structures to enable communities to take responsibility; training security forces on children's rights; and reunification of children recruited by armed groups with their families.

**Mr. Mamadou Kanté, Chair of National Safe Schools Follow-up Committee, Ministry of National Education, Mali**, spoke on measures Mali has put in place, including a National Technical Committee to monitor the operationalisation of the SSD and Regional Technical Committees in each region affected by insecurity. The National Technical Committee consists of government ministries, local and international CSOs, and UN agencies. This coordination structure meant Mali was able to monitor the progress of planned activities. In addition, building the capacity of key stakeholders in the committee to lead advocacy efforts with defence and security forces led to the decision to end occupation of schools, and to the empowerment of military engineers to construct prefabricated camps for troops in military operations. Also, the armed groups signed a commitment to respect the content of the SSD. The process of adopting a law for the protection of education during armed conflicts is running well, too.

“Regional collaboration can contribute to securing education by setting up a regional mechanism for the protection of education. This regional mechanism will essentially be responsible for sharing and monitoring good practices.”

*Mr. Mamadou Kanté, Chair of National Safe Schools Follow-up Committee, Ministry of National Education, Mali*

## IV. Panel 3: Way Forward: Investigating Allegations of Violations, Prosecuting Perpetrators, And Providing Assistance to Survivors

*The Safe Schools Declaration includes a commitment to investigate allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and, where appropriate, duly prosecute perpetrators. It also includes a commitment to provide assistance for victims. This panel addressed how international and national legal systems can achieve justice for victims and survivors of attacks on education, as well as serve as a deterrent for further attacks.*

This panel was moderated by **Mr. Anthony O. Ojukwu Esq., Executive Secretary, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Federal Republic of Nigeria**, and began with a [video](#) entitled “Calling Attendance” from Education Above All for the #unitetoprotect campaign.

**A Palestinian student survivor, ‘Mohammad,’** said, “Education is important for me as a child, because it’s my right. It grows my skills and knowledge so that I can become someone able to create change in my society and to have my voice heard. The things that make me feel safe at school are having safety procedures in place, like evacuation plans and having evacuation trainings so that if there are any problems or issues at school, we can deal with these issues in a safe way. The thing that makes me feel unsafe at school, especially as someone from an occupied country in Palestine [is that] our schools are exposed to many violations by the occupation. Teargas is often fired at our schools and they’re raided. This results in having to evacuate the schools and we aren’t able to finish our school day that day. I’d like to tell my government about our situation that there must be international observers that can help. That can help prevent the spread of future attacks and violations against children by the occupation. Procedures and rules should be put in place that prevent these things from happening, like the rules and procedures in the Safe Schools Declaration. These should be applied by the Israeli occupation. This would create a sense of safety in getting an education in Palestine. The SSD is important because it would change the reality of the violations that happen in Palestinian schools for children. If the Israeli army abided by the rules and procedures of the SSD, it will make going to school more safe, which is the simplest of rights that all children should have. Having this right would mean they can go to school, learn without feeling afraid of any injustice happening.”

**Dr. Cécile Aptel, Deputy Director, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)**, highlighted that from 2011 to 2021, at least 230,000 civilians have been killed or injured as a result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Children are more likely to die from injuries than adults. The impacts from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas include, but are not limited to, school closures and psychological effects that lead to higher student dropout rates. Accountability, although complex, can be supported by the availability of reliable data that measures the impact that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has had on education. UNIDIR has published two menus of indicators to measure the reverberating effects on civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The objective is to provide a framework for systematic and standardised data gathering.

**Ms. Mona Rishmawi, Chief Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch, Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**, focused on the judicial and non-judicial mechanisms that can be put in place to ensure accountability. A staggering 24,000 violations were committed against 20,000 children in conflict settings, with the highest number of violations in Afghanistan, DRC, Somalia, Syria and Yemen. Examples of judicial mechanisms include the Special Court in Sierra Leone, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and regional human right bodies. She also made reference to the human rights investigative bodies established by the Human Rights Council (HRC). While the mandates of these non-judicial bodies vary, they are empowered to document and investigate violations and preserve evidence with a view to ensuring accountability and bringing perpetrators to justice. In October 2021, the Fact-Finding Mission on Libya submitted their report to the HRC which included evidence on recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict and arbitrary detention of children in hostilities. At the same meeting, the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen also reported on the violations of children by all parties. Although these are non-judicial mechanisms, they do put a spotlight on what is happening and bring a level of political accountability that enhances the possibility of judicial accountability.

**Dr. Robert Doya Nanima, Special Rapporteur on Children Affected by Armed Conflict, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)**, detailed how the model law on Children and Armed Conflict was adopted to give normative guidance to states regarding the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including preventive and accountability measures. The law takes the best interests of the child as the starting point and main lens of analysis. It is an advocacy tool for the rights and welfare of children in armed conflicts that can be utilised by legislators, CSOs, and policy makers to advocate for more and better national legislative protective measures for children. It is a model of best practice that states can either adopt as is, or adapt to their own context, to account for specific needs. Lastly, the law provides clear definitions of key terms to facilitate implementation.

**Ms. Tirana Hassan, Deputy Executive Director and Chief Programmes Officer, Human Rights Watch (HRW)**, stated that without accountability for attacks on education, the goal of safe schools for all will not be achieved. True accountability must begin at the national level and starts by training and enforcement by armed forces. Although we rarely see domestic trials of preparators of attacks on education, a positive development took place in Burkina Faso in 2021, where there was a conviction of two members of an armed Islamist group for a 2018 attack on a primary school. The perpetrators were sentenced to 20 years. The world should not underestimate how much these processes mean to those who have been impacted, but accountability should not come at the cost of a fair justice system and due process.

“Achieving accountability for attacks on education requires due process and credible judicial systems. Furthermore, the role of governments assisting survivors as part of the SSD commitment cannot be overestimated. In their interactions with HRW investigations, many survivors highlighted the need for psychosocial support and compensation for losses.”

*Ms. Tirana Hassan, Deputy Executive Director and Chief Programmes Officer, Human Rights Watch*

A recent positive development is the Central African Republic's adoption of a new child law—among the first in the world—to criminalise the occupation of schools for military purposes in armed conflict on the same basis as attacks on schools. Nigeria is currently considering a legal amendment that would also ban the requisition of schools for military use, which would be another very positive development.

However, there has been little progress on the international front. Amongst other issues, the Prosecutor of the ICC has chosen not to seek accountability for attacks by the former Afghan government on students and schools. Similarly, although the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict included the attacks on education in Burkina Faso and Cameroon, it failed to include the February 2020 attacks in Aleppo by Russian government forces, and the situations in several other countries such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Ukraine. Whilst the UNSG annual report and its annexes have proven their ability to influence worrying parties' behavior for the better to promote accountability, it misses an opportunity if it doesn't list all perpetrators and indicate that all perpetrators must be held to account and held to the same standards.

## The following videos were played to close the session:

**Mr. Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management, European Commission**, reiterated that education represents the basis for hope, freedom, and resilience. It is also a strong tool for peace building. For every child, education plays an essential role in their childhood. As such, schools should remain safe havens and not increasingly under attack, especially in conflict-affected areas. The deliberate targeting of schools, children being attacked on their way to and from school, and the use of schools as bases for combat and child recruitment, contribute to high dropout rates and many not finishing their education. This is all evident in the Sahel, Afghanistan, and the crises in Ethiopia, Chad, Syria, Yemen and Myanmar, among many other places. The European Union's strong commitment to safe schooling and learning is enshrined in the EU policy on education in emergencies and protracted crises. This was reinforced by the first EU strategy on the rights of the child—a demonstration of the EU's commitment to intensify prevention and support to ending grave violations against children affected by armed conflict. In addition, the EU will continue to allocate ten percent of humanitarian aid funding to education in emergencies and promote the SSD amongst all EU member states. All delegates should stand behind these efforts and work together to translate commitment into practice by supporting projects, activities, and actors who are contributing to education for all and everywhere. The conference presents an opportunity to gather ideas on how the international community can assist further in implementation of the SSD as we owe it to the next generation.

**Mr. Peter Hawkins, UNICEF Representative, Nigeria**, thanked the government of Nigeria for hosting the conference at a difficult time. Despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent disruption in schooling, insecurity remains the major global problem. For example, 1,314 children and 17 teachers have been kidnapped in Nigeria since 9 December 2020. The SSD plays an integral role in the international community's response to ensure that children may continue learning wherever they are and whatever situation they are in. To tackle the issue of safe schools in Nigeria, it is necessary to first understand the reason why attacks are taking place, whether it is ideological, community conflict, banditry, or extortion. Second, affected states in the federation should develop their own action plan to secure education by identifying risks, how to mitigate against them as a form of prevention, and what timely responses can be launched should there be an actual attack. The third and main goal is to ensure communities themselves are able to protect the schools. Communities and schools work together through School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) and ensure that both communities and schools understand the value of education.

## V. Closing Ceremony

*To round up three days of exchanging good practice in realising the SSD commitments, Norway launched the state-led implementation network, which was followed by the presentation of the Children's Manifesto, and global leaders urging implementation of the SSD. Finally, Nigeria's Foreign Minister summed up the key takeaways, and Her Excellency, the First Lady, represented by her Special Assistant (African First Ladies Peace Mission), offered closing remarks.*

### Launch of the Implementation Network

**H.E. Mr. Knut Eiliv Lein, Ambassador of Norway in Abuja,** launched the Safe Schools Implementation Network to strengthen state-to-state cooperation on implementation of the Declaration. The aims of the Network are to: increase cooperation across states and regions; share good practice; collaborate across ministries; and offer opportunities to meet and attend workshops and trainings. The network, however, will only be successful if all stakeholders engage and strengthen collaboration on implementation between international conferences. Norway is also launching a digital platform where stakeholders can share experiences, ask questions, connect to experts, and access information.

A video entitled [Keep Us Safe](#) by Adebayo Okeowo was shown featuring two survivors of school attacks—Maryamu Wavi (Chibok, Nigeria) and Abeer Pamuk (Syria).

### Closing Statements

**Mr. Forest Whittaker, UN SDG Advocate and UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation,** declared that the SDGs cannot be achieved without education and highlighted the devastating situations faced by children in conflict zones. When schools are destroyed, or students are abducted and become child soldiers, most never recover the gift of education that was stolen from them. Many children he has met through his peacebuilding work with child soldiers in Uganda have expressed an avid desire for education and some even want to become educators. Attacks on schools create a climate of insecurity which limits the rights to education for the 1.6 billion children who live in conflict zones. It is imperative to ensure the right of learners and teachers to inhabit safe spaces. It is also glaringly clear that more governments must join those that have already endorsed the SSD. The Abuja Conference is a clear message to increase those efforts by raising them from commitment to practice. New methods and resources to protect schools and educational communities from attacks are urgently needed, such as allowing schools themselves to help prevent conflict and violence from happening. For example, a peacebuilding curriculum Mr. Whittaker helped develop is being implemented in Africa and the Americas and is helping schools and educational communities retain a climate of prevention and reconciliation which reverberates throughout the communities.

**H.E. Mr. Santiago Cafiero, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, Argentina,** appealed for continued collaboration between States, civil society, and international organisations to address the impact of armed conflict on education. The conference has enabled delegates to learn in greater detail the complexities of safeguarding education; for example, collecting data, investigating attacks, and identifying those responsible. Guaranteeing education is a fundamental part of humanitarian response to emergencies. This is because education plays a key role in building dialogue to enable cooperation, peacebuilding, and the protection of human rights. Moreover, education is a fundamental human right and the pillar of equity-based development for all people. We can spare no effort in protecting education.

The conference has buttressed the viewpoint that the Declaration is not only relevant for countries affected by armed conflict where it brings changes in the practices of parties engaged in combat, but also to the international community. This can be attributed to its universalisation which contributes to the expansion of a community of interested parties that seek to limit the military use of educational facilities and to protect and favour continued education during armed conflicts and other situations of violence. Progress has been made in the six years since the launch of the Declaration; however, the challenge still remains to achieve actual implementation of the Declaration. Argentina renews its commitment to the comprehensive defence of human rights and strengthening of international humanitarian law.

“ The implementation of the commitments in the Declaration will make a positive contribution to the attainment of the SDGs, especially those in relation to quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16). ”

*H.E. Mr. Santiago Cafiero, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, Argentina*

“ No matter how schools are affected, the outcome is the same: children eventually lose their fundamental right to build their own future. The long-term repercussions of attacks against education must be put at the centre of international decision making. It is well known that it takes years for a community to reinstall skilled teachers, to rebuild physical infrastructures, and to restore an education system. ”

*Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict*

**Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict,** noted that education is not only a fundamental right for boys and girls, but is essential for sustainable peace. Action Plans signed between parties to conflict and the UN provide a valuable tool to end and prevent attacks against schools. They include concrete actions requiring Governments to enact national legislation, establish community awareness campaigns, and investigate and prosecute alleged attacks and perpetrators. One such example is the Comprehensive Action Plan signed by the Government of South Sudan. Armed groups are also asked to act and to put in place disciplinary measures for perpetrators of attacks against schools, and to hand them over to national authorities amongst others.

Examples of this are the Actions Plans in the Central African Republic signed by three armed groups that were part of the former Seleka coalition.

**Mr. Peter Maurer, President, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**, highlighted ways in which the ICRC engages with all parties in armed conflict, namely: (1) Speaking to arm bearers; (2) delivering programmes that mitigate the physical and psychological effects of conflict; and (3) working with authorities to create policy frameworks for school safety. Behaviours of weapons bearers must change, but affected communities must also receive the support they need. In South Sudan, for example, the ICRC worked with the Ministry of Education to ensure that conflict-affected students could take their 2020–2021 national exams. In Colombia, students and teachers learned to assess risk and respond to outbreaks of violence by conducting drills and establishing contingency plans. These interventions strengthen the community's preparedness, self-protection, and security. Education must be protected better at a systems level. For instance, Brazil developed an online platform application that allowed teachers to report school shootings in real time and request support. This innovation reduced school closure by 46 percent despite an increase in school shootings by 39 percent in the same areas. This methodology to mitigate risk has been adopted as public policy. Multilateral cooperation is needed for endorsing states to respect the safe schools Guidelines; frontline communities must be prioritised in humanitarian response and the effect of conflict on educational systems must be managed.

**Rt Hon. Gordon Brown, UN Special Envoy for Global Education**, outlined four broader reforms that add up to a comprehensive blueprint for safe schools: (1) enhanced information-sharing and communication about intelligence and security information through engagement of the Governors and intergovernmental fora; (2) detailed state-by-state school safety plans which are made public; (3) investment in community outreach and engagement programs working with traditional and religious

leaders; and (4) empowerment of local people - though school management committees - to make their own local decisions to prioritise pupil and teacher safety.

“...I promise that I will do everything I can to mobilise international financial and other support and worldwide expertise to help deliver the programmes.”

*Rt Hon Gordon Brown, United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education*

**H.E. Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria**, thanked everyone for the extensive deliberations that took place over the three days. He summarised the proceedings and the recommendations from the conference and closed by stating, “We urge other states to make concrete commitments themselves to bring the lessons learned at this conference back home and to work towards building a society in which all children and young people can study and learn in safety and educators and academics can teach and conduct research without the threat of violence.”

**Nigerian First Lady, H. E. Dr. Aisha Buhari**, represented by **Dr. Mairo Almakura, Special Assistant (African First Ladies Peace Mission)**, closed the conference. She thanked the state delegations and representatives from international organisations and civil society for their engagement during the conference and encouraged them to maintain momentum and ensure follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations. The conference ended with a performance by children from Government School Kubwa and Government Secondary School Garki.

*Photo: Group photograph with school children, Dr. Mairo Almakura, Special Assistant (African First Ladies Peace Mission), H.E. Mr. Geoffrey Onyeama, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Mr. Knut Eiliv Lein, Ambassador of Norway in Abuja, H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E Mr. Alejandro Herrero, Ambassador of Argentina in Abuja, and Ms. Zama Neff,*



## Key Recommendations From the Conference

**States should endorse, support, and implement the Safe Schools Declaration in a gender-responsive way, taking into account the particular needs of boys and girls.**

### 1. Specific Recommendations:

#### Restrict military use of educational facilities:

- Parties to conflict should take concrete measures—for example, through standing orders, military doctrine, and training—to deter the military use of schools, drawing upon examples of good practice by other countries, and at a minimum, implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict. Parties to conflict should vacate all schools being occupied as military bases where feasible alternatives exist, and where they do not, take steps to identify or create feasible alternatives.
- Leaders of non-state armed groups should order commanders not to use school buildings or school property for military purposes and implement the Guidelines, and should take all measures necessary to ensure that their combatants strictly comply with international humanitarian law and the principles of international human rights law.
- UN peacekeepers should refrain from using schools and universities for military purposes, in keeping with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations' 2017 child protection policy and the UN Infantry Battalion Manual.
- States, the UN, and regional bodies with peacekeeping forces should ensure that the mandates of peacekeeping missions include and have the capacity to monitor, report, and respond to attacks on schools, military use of schools, and abductions, recruitment, and children. Peacekeeping missions should strengthen coordination with child protection actors to ensure adequate safety assessment of educational facilities that were used for military purposes.
- States, the UN and regional peacekeeping bodies should ensure that child protection advisors are part of military and peacekeeping operations in order to strengthen protection and prevent violations against children particularly girls.
- The African Union and troop-contributing countries should enforce the African Union Doctrine on Peace Operations, which effectively bans the use of schools for military purposes by regional peacekeepers and disseminate its provisions and incorporate them into deployment trainings.

### 2. Ensure the continuation of education during conflict.

States, with support from international organisations, donors, and civil society, should:

- Increase funding to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education in conflict-affected areas linked to national action plans, risk assessments, education continuity plans, and comprehensive safety and security plans, among others;
- “Build back better” after attacks on education and ensure funding not only to repair but to improve schools and make them safer and more inclusive to all students and educators;
- Strengthen bottom-up capacity and engagement in preparedness planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, risk assessments, and school safety and security by consulting parents, community leaders, traditional and religious leaders, teachers, and children themselves on how to ensure safe learning environments;
- Extend distance learning innovations that may have been implemented during COVID-19 to learners and teachers who are affected by attacks on education;
- Provide support for the safe and meaningful participation and consultation of children and youth in decisions about the protection of education and ensure that measures are informed by their perspectives;
- Scale up training programmes for teachers on conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive education, social inclusion, and how to support and care for students suffering from post-traumatic stress, specifically including girls suffering from psychological trauma and stigma from sexual violence;
- Provide non-discriminatory assistance for all survivors of attacks on education, including psycho-social support, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or other attributes, while taking into account survivors' distinct needs and experiences based on gender and potential vulnerabilities such as disability and forced displacement;
- Encourage international donors and the private sector to: devote more funding to education in emergencies; support holistic approaches to creating safe learning environments; and minimise conflict-related disruptions to education;
- Protect higher education institutions from threats to autonomy through the implementation and monitoring of normative instruments, such as through the Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) and GCPEA's Principles of State Responsibility to Protect Higher Education from Attack.

### 3. Strengthen accountability for attacks on education.

*States, with support from international organisations, donors, and civil society, should:*

- Enact national legislation to implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines and strengthen prevention, response, and accountability for attacks on education;
- Ensure accountability and redress for attacks on education, including by conducting investigations and fair trials of perpetrators of attacks on education;
- Support criminal accountability measures at the state level or, where necessary, escalate to international mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), and support the establishment of internationalized or hybrid courts as needed; and
- Request that existing and future human rights and accountability mechanisms, including commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions, and investigations, more systematically consider attacks on education.

### 4. Enhance monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, coordination in implementing the SSD, and exchange of good practice.

*States, with support from international organisations, donors and civil society, should:*

- Collect disaggregated data at the national level on attacks on education so that the impacts of such attacks can be better understood, and prevention and response measures can be developed and can take into account the unique needs of girls and women, and boys and men;
- Adopt guidance from GCPEA's Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education in developing monitoring systems and humanitarian or sectoral needs assessments;
- Create government action plans for implementing the Safe Schools Declaration that ensure coordinated action, collective responsibility
- Support strong regional collaboration and peer-to-peer exchange of good practices to protect education through regional mechanisms, and enhance regional efforts to monitor and report on attacks on education and military use of schools.

### Recommendations from the Children's Manifesto

1. Ensure that children can get to and from their schools safely. Some things that can be done to do this are:
  - Improve the roads used by the children to get to school and maintain them so that children are not harmed.
  - Provide safe transportation for children to and from school. Do not allow armies to inspect children. End the long delays caused by checkpoints. Ensure children are safe from recruitment along the way.
  - Ensure the paths that children travel are safe, that they are free of mines and explosives, and that they do not cross where armed groups or military bases or checkpoints are located.
2. Have authorised civilian security personnel, who are not part of the armed conflict, guard educational facilities and check that there is no danger to children, such as mines or explosives near or inside schools. Check frequently before school starts so that children are not afraid to go to school.
3. Promote spaces for dialogue between the government and groups involved in the armed conflict. Generate agreements to ensure children and schools cannot be involved in the conflicts. Emphasize that schools must be protected and children must be kept away from attacks.
4. Parties to the conflict must think of us children, our future and the future of the country. Lay down your weapons and make peace. We want peace so that we can return back to our villages and schools.
5. Prevent external personnel from entering and harming students or any school personnel through identity registration and identity cards that would be used upon entering the institutions.
6. Governments should help low-income educational institutions to have all the equipment they need to teach their classes. This can make classes more fun and motivating for children to continue studying. Some children think that classes are boring and leave their studies and risk being recruited.
7. Governments should install metal detectors in schools to prevent armed people from entering the institution and harming teachers, students or any staff.
8. Hold meetings in educational institutions where children can express their problems, concerns and proposals to make schools safer.
9. Provide quality education that allows children to complete their full education cycle close to home, including children who live in rural areas. If children need to leave their communities to complete their education, they are more prone to give up school and this can make them more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.
10. Ensure that the resources that are earmarked for education are not diverted and fall into criminal or corrupt hands so that education is truly protected.
11. Governments must help children who have been victims of war with professional psychological support to help them overcome the traumas left by the conflict.



# 4<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION ABUJA, NIGERIA 25-27 OCTOBER, 2021



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



Ministerio de Relaciones Exterior  
Comercio Internacional y Culto  
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