



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

 **Norway**



Safe Education for all:

A Decade of Commitment, A call to Action through the safe schools Declaration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 2025



LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
ESARO	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
EU	European Union
GCPEA	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SSD	Safe Schools Declaration
SRSR-CAAC	Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: A DECADE OF SSD

The Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration took place on 25–26 November 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya. This landmark event marked the 10th anniversary of the Safe Schools Declaration, a global commitment endorsed by 122 Member States to protect students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflict.

Hosted by the Government of Kenya, in partnership with the Governments of Argentina, Norway and Spain, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children and Plan International, the Conference brought together over 400 participants from 57 governments, UN agencies, civil society, academia, children and youth advocates. It served as a platform to reflect on progress made in a decade, share experiences, reflect on remaining challenges, and culminated in the presentation of the Nairobi Outcome Document – a roadmap to ensure that education is never a target of war.

CONFERENCE OBJECTIVES: FROM COMMITMENT TO IMPLEMENTATION

Under the theme **A Decade of Commitment, A Call to Action through the Safe Schools Declaration**, the conference was designed to spur transition from stock-taking to implementation, with four core objectives:

- **Stocktaking and Learning:** Assessing progress and persistent challenges in implementing the Declaration and its Guidelines by sharing experiences to inform global practice.
- **Accelerating Implementation:** Renewed focus on translating SSD commitments into national laws, policies, and military practices, advancing strengthened partnerships among states, regional bodies, civil society and international organizations, encouraging measuring impact through concrete actions.
- **Addressing Implementation Gaps:** Tackle persistent challenges in accountability, financing, and gender-responsive protection through evidence-based solutions and promoting actions that strengthen international and domestic legal mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable and provide assistance to survivors
- **Including Affected Voices:** Ensure policy is shaped by the direct experiences of conflict-affected children, youth, and educators, moving from token participation to meaningful inclusion.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE:

- **Reinforced political commitment:** Increase in the number of SSD endorsing states and renewed public commitments by existing signatories.
- Actionable implementation strategies: Practical, context-sensitive recommendations for implementing SSD commitments at national, regional, and international levels.
- **Strengthened accountability and monitoring:** Improved national and international mechanisms to monitor and respond to attacks on education, with clearer pathways to justice for victims and survivors.
- **Youth and survivor inclusion:** Amplified participation of children, youth, and survivors in shaping protection strategies and influencing policy.



- **Enhanced regional and international cooperation:** Stronger partnerships among governments, international and regional organizations, and civil society to protect education from attack.

These outcomes were reflected in the Nairobi Outcome Document, the official outcome document of the Conference, in the closing ceremony.

DAY 1: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES ON STRENGTHENING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

High-Level Opening Ceremony and Commitment Session: Securing the present and future of Safe Education.

The High-Level Opening Ceremony underscored the global urgency of protecting education in contexts of conflict and marked a renewed call to translate political commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) into concrete, measurable action. Speakers emphasized that education is a lifeline for children affected by crisis, a legal and moral responsibility of States, and a critical investment in peace, stability, and social cohesion.

Master of Ceremony, **Mike Gitone**, opened the conference and guided the discussions for the following two days. Opening remarks by **Dr. Stephen Jackson**, UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya, framed education as a core humanitarian and development priority, stressing that States endorsing the SSD are duty-bearers with concrete implementation obligations, not merely symbolic commitments. **Ambassador Professor Julius Bitok**, Principal Secretary for Basic Education in Kenya, called for accountability for all attacks on education, urging participants to make the Conference a turning point for conflict-affected learners.

Orlaith Minogue, Chair of GCPEA, highlighted the unprecedented participation of conflict-affected States and marked the 10th anniversary of the SSD, noting its growth from 37 States in 2015 to 122 today. She emphasized that anniversaries are moments for recommitment and reaffirmed GCPEA's readiness to support governments in translating commitments into practice.

Regional perspectives were offered by **Hadja Lahbib**, European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, **Erika Sanchez Pinto**, Congresswoman from Colombia, and **Richard Atwaru** from COMESA. Ms. Pinto committed to drive an initiative in Colombia to criminalize attacks on education in the legislation, COMESA linked education protection to long-term regional security and prosperity, while Ms. Lahbib reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the SSD.

Julius Migos Ogamba, Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Education of Kenya, provided the Host's welcome remarks and introduced the other conference co-hosts. High-level political commitments were reaffirmed by **Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik**, State Secretary of Norway, who noted that implementation of the SSD demonstrably improves protection outcomes, **Lucia García Rico**, Director General for the UN at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain whom reaffirmed Spain's continued support to SSD implementation, and **Ambassador Luis Alejandro Levit** of Argentina, who stressed that the Declaration is relevant to the entire international community, not only conflict-affected States.



UN partners reinforced the need for implementation at all levels. Representing UNESCO, **Louise Haxthausen**, Regional Director outlined three pillars of a forthcoming global plan related to the SSD: strengthened global advocacy and partnerships, a more robust Education in Emergencies (EiE) response including integration of school safety into national education plans and teacher training, and advancing education for peace through inclusive, non-violent learning environments. **UNICEF Regional Director Etleva Kadilli** called for accelerated action to domesticate the SSD, ensure continuity of education and rapid recovery through school safety plans and early warning systems, and protect and increase EiE financing.

Civil society leaders emphasized localization and equity. Hajir Maalim, Regional Director for Plan International highlighted that attacks on education are not gender-neutral, calling for gender-responsive protections and locally funded, gender-sensitive school safety plans, while elevating children's voices in decision-making. **Henriette Westhrin**, CEO of Save the Children Norway, urged States to move from rhetoric to action, including reviewing military manuals, training armed forces, and listening to children. She referenced new evidence showing that one in five children globally, and one in three in Africa, live in conflict zones.

Finally, **H.E. Dr. Musalia Mudavadi**, Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs of Kenya, concluded the high-level ceremony declaring "A decade of commitments is only meaningful if it yields a decade of results," warning that when schools fall silent, pathways to stability and peace are significantly prolonged. This statement served as the conference's central challenge, framing success through measurable outcomes, reflected in the Nairobi Outcome Document.

Keynote Address: Protecting the Right to Education and Children's Rights during Armed Conflict.

The session highlighted the urgent deterioration of education protection in armed conflict and called for accelerated implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD). **Dr. William Sugut**, Director, State Department for Basic Education, Kenya, opened this session stressing that education is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of peace, recovery, and resilience, and that commitments must translate into action felt by children and communities on the ground.

Ibrahim Zanna Sunoma, child activist from Nigeria, skillfully moderated the session and delivered a powerful child-centered perspective, stressing that attacks on education are violations of childhood itself and that the SSD must be treated as a promise to children. In an inspiring video message, High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Volker Türk** emphasized that prevention is far easier than rebuilding stolen childhoods and lost opportunities, noting rising attacks in Sudan, Ukraine, and Gaza and calling for urgent preventive action. He described schools as critical infrastructure of the future and emphasized their role in healing and reconciliation.

Vanessa Frazier, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC), reported a 60% increase in verified attacks on schools in 2024 (1,265 incidents), the highest level of violations in the 30-year history of the mandate. She called on States to reaffirm commitments to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and SSD, endorse complementary frameworks (Paris and Vancouver Principles), and ensure meaningful child participation, enabling children and youth to contribute to decisions, policies and monitoring efforts affecting their safety and education rights. She emphasized that UN Security Council Resolution 2601 must be implemented and that monitoring should drive accountability, not merely documentation.



Timothy Ekesa, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, underscored that schools must be sanctuaries, calling for domestic legislation prohibiting military use of schools and accountability for perpetrators. Ekesa concluded with a significant announcement, that the Committee will increasingly use the Safe Schools Declaration as a benchmark in its concluding observations to states, making SSD implementation a measurable component of states' human rights obligations.

Dr. Julia Dicum, Director of Education at UNRWA, described the near-total destruction of Gaza's education system, noting that 97% of schools have been attacked, 92% require rehabilitation, and 307 UNRWA staff have been killed, most of them educators. She warned that children in Gaza may lose up to five years of education by 2026, undermining future recovery and identity. The session concluded with a message of hope from UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, **David Beckham**.

The opening ceremony and keynote session set the tone for the deliberations that took place over the next two days with a clear message: **Education is not a privilege, it is a non-negotiable right that applies even in times of armed conflict.**

Voices from the Ground Forum – Voices from Conflict-Affected Children, Youth, Teachers, and Communities

The Voices from the Ground Forum shifted the focus from policy frameworks to the lived realities of children, educators, and communities affected by armed conflict, reinforcing that effective protection of education must be rooted in local experience. Co-moderated by **Scholah Chebet**, a child activist from Kenya, and **Henriette Westhrin**, Save the Children Norway's CEO, the session demonstrated that behind every statistic is a child whose safety, dignity, and future depend on decisions taken at national and international levels.

Hon. Carren Ageng'o, Principal Secretary- State Department for Children's Services, Kenya, provided opening remarks, highlighting the rising displacement of children and persistence of grave violations in the country, underscoring the need for stronger, community-based child protection systems. She stressed that parents, teachers, and youth are the first line of defence for children in crisis, and that children's voices must not be treated as supplementary, but as central to shaping global action and policymaking.

Ramadhan Ahishakiye Irakoze, a child activist from Kenya provided a compelling definition of safe education as the ability to attend school without fear, noting the daily challenges faced by refugee students, including overcrowded classrooms, unsafe routes to school, and inadequate infrastructure. The intervention reinforced that protection efforts must address not only learners' safety, but also parents' confidence that their children will return home safely.

Grace Acan, survivor and activist from Uganda, shared her experience of being abducted from school at the age of 16 and held captive for eight years. She described education as the anchor of her recovery and now advocates for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Her intervention highlighted the dual imperative of preventing attacks on education and ensuring long-term healing, reintegration, and educational access for children already affected by conflict. **Faid Warsame**, teacher at Dadaab Primary School, reflected on the challenges faced by teachers operating in situations of conflict and the realities on the ground for children, teachers, and communities.



Layla Hasso, Adviser on Accountability to Affected People at OCHA Syria, outlined a practical, evidence-based approach to protecting education, built on three pillars: enabling systems, using evidence, and engaging the right people. She emphasized that equipping national education systems with safety tools, protocols, and assessments, combined with real-time documentation of attacks, allows schools to rapidly adapt through schedule changes, relocation, and protective measures. She stressed that evidence is essential not only for immediate protection, but also for accountability, justice, and post-conflict reconstruction. **Jean-Marc Mazio Heri**, Provincial Division Chief for Gender in the Democratic Republic of Congo shared reflections on his 20 years of experience working in leading provincial policy implementation on gender, child protection, and GBV prevention.

Contributions from the floor, including from the SRSG CAAC reaffirmed that children's voices must be systematically integrated into UN advocacy and decision-making, ensuring that commitments made at international forums reflect ground-level realities.

The session concluded with a shared recognition that protecting education requires intentional listening to children and communities, strengthened local systems, and evidence-driven action, and that sustainable progress will only be achieved when global commitments are shaped by – and accountable to – the communities and children they are meant to serve.

Plenary Session: Global Stock-taking - Achievements, Challenges, Status of SSD Endorsement and Implementation.

The Global Stocktaking session reviewed ten years of progress made under the Safe Schools Declaration assessing achievements, persistent gaps, and priorities for strengthening implementation at national, regional, and global levels. The discussion underscored that while the SSD has become a central global framework for protecting education in armed conflict, attacks on education continue to rise, highlighting the urgent need to move from commitment to consistent, coordinated action. The discussion was moderated by **Ghanim Zainal**, a youth advocate from Qatar.

Ilaria Paolazzi, Senior Advocacy and Policy Adviser at GCPEA, presented a global overview of the situation, noting that 122 States have endorsed the SSD since its launch in 2015, contributing to reforms in laws, military policies, and education systems. She emphasized that the SSD has influenced UN and African Union policies, including restrictions on the military use of schools, and has supported the establishment of inter-ministerial monitoring and reporting mechanisms in at least ten countries. However, she warned that attacks on education have more than doubled in 2024, with an average of eight schools attacked every day, and persistent violations reported in contexts including Gaza, Sudan, Nigeria, Myanmar, Ukraine, Colombia, and Haiti. Military use of schools, weak coordination, and limited accountability remain key challenges.

Cathrine Andersen, Policy Director and Special Representative for Protection of Civilians at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, reflected on Norway's leadership in launching the SSD and the early skepticism surrounding prohibitions on military use of schools. She highlighted the essential role played by civil society organizations, humanitarian actors, and youth in advancing the agenda, noting that improved data, operational tools, and donor engagement have strengthened responses, even as conflicts continue to disrupt children's education. She emphasized that the tools now exist, and the priority must be to use political influence and resources to drive change.



Dr. Sandra Krähenmann, Head of Policy, Research and Legal Unit at Geneva Call, focused on engagement with non-State armed groups (NSAGs), stressing that protection of education is often impossible without dialogue in areas where States have limited presence. She described how the SSD's Guidelines are used to influence NSAG behaviour in contexts such as Iraq and Myanmar, supporting commitments to protect schools and children. While progress has been made, she noted ongoing challenges related to compliance monitoring, documentation, and structural damage to school infrastructure, underscoring the need for practical implementation and accountability mechanisms.

Margaryta Rymarenko, Senior Education Cluster Coordinator for Ukraine, highlighted the role of monitoring and data in guiding emergency responses, prevention measures, and advocacy. She explained how Education Clusters use attack data to prioritize support, inform safety measures, establish temporary learning spaces, and expand psychosocial support. Despite improvements since 2022, she noted persistent challenges, including data gaps, reliance on open-source information, and limited disaggregated government reporting, all of which constrain timely protection efforts.

Interventions from the floor from States and partners reinforced these themes. Germany and Colombia reaffirmed their political commitment to protecting education, emphasizing accountability, psychosocial support, and inclusion of marginalized communities. An intervention from Save the Children Japan highlighted ongoing advocacy efforts toward SSD endorsement, noting domestic debates regarding the scope of the Declaration.

The session concluded with a shared recognition that, while the SSD has driven meaningful normative and operational change over the past decade, implementation remains uneven. Sustained progress will depend on translating commitments into national legislation and practice, strengthening monitoring and coordination, and reaffirming the protection of education as both a legal obligation and a foundation for peace and community resilience.

Solution Showcase: Innovations in Multisectoral Domestication of the Safe Schools Declaration

The Solution Showcase highlighted how, over the past decade, states and partners have translated the Safe Schools Declaration into concrete, context-specific action through multisectoral collaboration, community engagement, and innovative financing and coordination models. The interactive booth format enabled peer learning and informal networking by showcasing practical approaches that bridge policy, humanitarian response, education systems, and peacebuilding. The SRSR CAAC and Norway's Secretary of State were joined by the Chair of GCPEA for a walkthrough of the innovative initiatives showcased during the session.

Several states and partners demonstrated leadership in coordinated implementation to ensure the continuity of education during armed conflict. **GCPEA**, together with **Norway and Nigeria**, showcased the **State-led Implementation Network on the SSD**, highlighting peer-to-peer learning, intergovernmental cooperation, and accountability mechanisms that support the translation of SSD commitments into action at the national level. **The Spanish Cooperation (AECID)** presented its sustained technical support to SSD implementation, including global online trainings, regional workshops, and leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean through an integrated approach linking the SSD, the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF), and INEE Minimum Standards.



Innovations addressing community-level implementation and learning continuity featured prominently. **Concern Worldwide** illustrated its “Learning Together” programme in Niger, demonstrating how conflict-sensitive, community-based design enabled over 4,500 out-of-school children to return safely to learning. **Plan International** showcased the local-language translation of the SSD in Mali and Burkina Faso, underscoring how accessibility and community ownership can accelerate school reopening and strengthen local SSD committees. **FAWE** (Forum for African Women Educationalists) highlighted gender-responsive and inclusive approaches, presenting evidence-based tools and initiatives supporting girls’ safety and participation in conflict and displacement settings across Africa.

Other booths emphasized the importance of data, coordination, and legal clarity. The **Global Education Cluster** demonstrated how coordination mechanisms in contexts such as Mali, Palestine, and Ukraine contribute to collective protection responses and school safety. **GADRRRES** (Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector) and **INEE** (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) contextualized the SSD within an all-hazards approach, illustrating how the CSSF and **INEE** Minimum Standards reinforce SSD implementation through local partnerships. The **International Committee of the Red Cross** presented its new Legal Commentary on the SSD Guidelines, clarifying their consistency with international humanitarian law and supporting greater compliance by both state and non-state actors.

Innovative approaches to advocacy, negotiation, and child participation were also showcased. The **Beyond Compliance Consortium** introduced the CEASEFIRE! 2D simulation game as a learning tool for practitioners on ceasefire negotiations and protection of education. **Save the Children** demonstrated creative, ethical, and scalable models for integrating children’s voices into international policy processes, including virtual participation and child-led advocacy. **UNESCO IICBA** highlighted its work on strengthening teacher systems and professional development for crisis and emergency contexts across Africa.

The session aimed at reinforcing the understanding that effective SSD domestication is multisectoral, locally grounded, and practice-driven, and that scaling up these innovations through peer learning and sustained investment is critical to ensuring safe, inclusive, and resilient education systems in conflict-affected contexts.

DAY 2: STRENGTHENING GLOBAL COMMITMENTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SAFE EDUCATION

Plenary Session: Gendered Impact of attacks on education and Gender-Responsive implementation of the SSD.

Day two opened with a session that examined how attacks on education affect girls, boys, women, and men differently, and why a gender-responsive approach is essential to effective implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD). Moderated by **Lucía García Rico**, Director General for the United Nations and Human Rights at Spain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the discussion emphasized that gender perspectives are not optional but central to prevention, protection, and recovery.

Anne Wang’ombe, Principal Secretary for Gender and Affirmative Action in Kenya, positioned safe education as a national priority, calling for a whole-of-society approach and zero tolerance



for school-related gender-based violence. She highlighted the distinct risks faced by girls—including sexual violence, early marriage, and harmful practices—as well as the risks faced by boys, such as recruitment and abduction. She outlined Kenya’s focus on investing in safe school infrastructure, strengthening protection for teachers, and addressing persistent challenges such as data gaps, harmful social norms, and climate-related insecurity.

Dr. Allyson Bachta, Senior Researcher at GCPEA, presented evidence showing that gender and intersecting identities shape who is targeted, how harm occurs, and which protections are effective. She stressed that gender analysis is about reflecting realities rather than excluding any group, and emphasized the urgent need for gender-disaggregated data to address underreported, under-investigated, and under-prosecuted violations. She called for stronger partnerships with women’s networks and national authorities to improve accountability.

Elizabeth Yator, Deputy Head Teacher from Kenya’s Rift Valley, shared frontline experience of how attacks lead to displacement, dropout, and trauma, particularly for girls. She emphasized that psychosocial support for both learners and teachers is essential, alongside accountability and the inclusion of local voices in designing responses. She highlighted measures such as deploying female teachers and reinforcing school security to support girls’ enrolment and retention.

Belsuk Tapgun-Alimikhena, Director of Operations and Strategy at the Neem Foundation in Nigeria, focused on the challenges of reintegration after attacks, noting that returning to school is often complicated by stigma, trauma, and safety concerns. She stressed that healing and learning must happen simultaneously through trauma-informed, community-anchored models that link policy to practice, combine psychosocial support with flexible learning options, and strengthen safety planning.

Bede Sheppard, Deputy Director for Children’s Rights at Human Rights Watch, highlighted how international human rights law has clear guarantees of the right to education without discrimination, including discrimination against girls and women; and international humanitarian law and criminal law recognize rape and other forms of indescendent assaults as war crimes. He suggested two areas where domestic legal and policy implementation could go further: noting that both partial military use of schools, and deployment of armed forces to protect a school, can disproportionately disrupt girls’ education, we need more implementation of the relevant Safe Schools’ Guidelines for Protecting Schools from Military Use during Armed Conflict into military doctrine, training, and sharing of good practices. He pointed to promising developments, including the integration of SSD guidance into military doctrine in some contexts, as well as emerging global initiatives on recognizing gender apartheid in the proposed Crimes Against Humanity Treaty, and a proposed new optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizing a right to early childhood education, and to free, public pre-primary and secondary education.

Finally, Youth activist **Yvone Eipa Kiyana** from Turkana County, Kenya, shared a call to action, reinforcing the urgency of the situation and reminding participants that the SSD represents a promise to current and future generations, particularly in contexts where conflict and climate change intersect to deepen girls’ vulnerability.

The session concluded with a shared understanding that gender-responsive implementation of the SSD requires political prioritization, reliable data, community-led solutions, and accountability, and that protecting education will only be effective if it responds to the distinct experiences, risks, and resilience of all learners.



Plenary Session: Protecting schools and universities from military use: Upholding International Humanitarian Law and the key role of armed actors in preserving the civilian character of educational facilities during armed conflict

This plenary session brought together experts, practitioners, and representatives of armed forces to examine the limits imposed by international humanitarian law (IHL) on the military use of educational facilities, and to highlight practical measures for implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Discussions focused on laws, policies, training, and accountability mechanisms that preserve the civilian character of schools and universities.

In the keynote address, **Isaac Masinde**, the Secretary of Administration in the Ministry of Defence, Kenya, outlined existing African Union doctrines and directives supporting the Safe Schools Declaration, including the prohibition of military use of educational facilities, monitoring and reporting for accountability, child protection staff and training within missions, and support for continuity of education in armed conflict and post-conflict recovery. He expressed optimism that SSD commitments would be increasingly domesticated at national level and institutionalized by regional bodies such as the AU and IGAD, and highlighted stabilization efforts by the Kenya Defence Forces in peacekeeping operations that incorporate school renovation through community-focused approaches. Mr. Masinde also stressed the importance of reinforcing cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education at national level to ensure the continuity of education during armed conflict.

Moderated by **Bede Sheppard**, Deputy Director for Children's Rights at Human Rights Watch, the panel featured concrete examples of implementation by state and multilateral actors. The Armed Forces of the Philippines, represented by **Major Angeline Rose A. Alferez JAGS**, presented national laws that criminalize attacks on, and occupation of, schools as grave child rights violations and war crimes, as well as related policies and training measures, including on the prevention of military use of educational facilities. These include systematic training of military personnel, integration of protections into operational planning and rules of engagement, and clear justice mechanisms for breaches through military and civilian courts.

From Nigeria, **Uche Catherine Okwuobi** of the National Human Rights Commission provided a thorough overview of the national progress on the SSD implementation achieved through interministerial collaboration, training of military personnel, and the establishment of response centers, among other measures. **Ms. Okwuobi** also presented the draft legislation in Nigeria on protecting schools during armed conflict, which includes the ban on the military use of educational facilities and is currently under parliamentary consideration.

Maria Trovato of the UN Department of Peace Operations outlined UN-wide frameworks prohibiting peacekeeping forces from using schools for military purposes, attacking them, and conducting military activities around them, supported by training for civilian, police, and military personnel, mission-level guidance, and monitoring and reporting of violations. She also noted efforts to address evolving warfare through early warning indicators, enhanced analysis and use of peacekeeping intelligence, and strong partnerships with regional organizations.

Dr. Elvis Fokala of the Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, discussed the new General Comment on the Right to Education (Art. 11) adopted in 2025 by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which forbids any military use of educational facilities.



He also discussed pathways for African States to domesticate SSD commitments and called for inclusive approaches that prohibit the use of schools for military and electoral purposes and expand the concept of safe schools to encompass both physical infrastructure and learner and teacher wellbeing. Finally, Dr. Fokala analyzed emerging threats, including those linked to climate-related insecurity.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), represented by **Giorgio Macor**, offered an operational perspective drawn from its work in more than 130 armed conflicts, highlighting the persistent risks that attacks against educational facilities and the military use of schools pose to education. He recalled that protection of education is firmly grounded in IHL and international human rights law, and presented the ICRC's newly launched **Legal Commentary on the SSD Guidelines**. The Commentary clarifies the consistency of the Guidelines with IHL, addresses legal concerns raised by non-endorsing States, highlights their potential to strengthen compliance with existing legal frameworks, and supports effective implementation across diverse conflict settings.

The session concluded by underscoring that **protecting schools from attack and military use in contravention of IHL is both a legal obligation and a practical necessity**, and that sustained training, clear rules, accountability, and regional and international cooperation are essential to preserving education as a civilian and protective space during armed conflict.

Plenary Session: Ensuring greater Accountability for attacks on Education

This session focused on accountability as a cornerstone of justice, deterrence, and effective implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), emphasizing that persistent impunity for attacks on education undermines victims' rights, public trust, and long-term peace. Moderated by **Siraj Khan**, Law and Policy Manager at Education Above All Foundation, the discussion highlighted the need to move beyond fragmented efforts toward systemic, survivor-centred accountability frameworks.

Hon. Mr. Justice Luka Kimaru, Judge of the Court of Appeal of Kenya, stressed that when children are denied education through attacks, they lose far more than schooling—they lose future opportunity and dignity. He underscored that impunity fuels cycles of violence and called for stronger domestic, regional, and international judicial cooperation to ensure accountability, with victims placed firmly at the centre of justice processes.

Michelle Oliel, Justice Rapid Response expert deployed as Accountability Advisor to GCPEA, highlighted the alarming rise in attacks on education and the continued failure of justice systems to deliver remedies for victims and survivors. She emphasized that explicit criminalisation of attacks on education is preferable to reliance on broader offences, as it reflects the social and symbolic importance of education and enables more accurate documentation, investigation, and prosecution. She underscored that the SSD requires States not only to prevent attacks but also to investigate violations, prosecute perpetrators, and provide reparations, and promoted the GCPEA **Accountability Toolbox**, including the Legislative Checklist, as a practical resource for strengthening national legal frameworks.

Ruby Axelson, Head of the Gender and Child Justice Division at Global Rights Compliance, addressed persistent institutional gaps, noting that children are often invisible in investigations and rarely treated as independent rights holders. She highlighted that investigations tend to focus on damage to infrastructure rather than harm to students, teachers, and communities, obscuring violations of economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to education. Drawing on international jurisprudence, she stressed that denial of education can amount to



persecution and called for a shift in mindset to centre children's experiences in accountability efforts.

Bringing a transitional justice perspective, **Giovanni Alvarez Santoyo**, Director and Chief Prosecutor of Colombia's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, outlined Colombia's four pillars of peace—truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence—and described ongoing efforts to criminalise specific acts related to attacks on education within domestic law. He emphasized that restorative justice and early reparations are essential, particularly for displaced children and survivors of sexual violence, and that accountability must address the broader societal harm caused by attacks on teachers, schools, and learning systems.

Interventions from civil society, including representatives from Sudan, reinforced that in contexts of ongoing bombardment and displacement, education risks becoming secondary to survival, yet remains central to children's hopes for recovery. Speakers stressed that education must be reparative, not symbolic, for communities affected by sustained violence.

The session concluded with a shared understanding that accountability for attacks on education requires strong laws, specialised judicial capacity, reliable data, and survivor-centred approaches, and that achieving meaningful deterrence will depend on sustained political will to translate SSD commitments into enforceable legal and justice mechanisms.

Plenary Session: Mobilizing Resources & Partnerships to accelerate SSD implementation and Sustainable Development Goals by 2030

This session focused on the critical role of resource mobilization, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and innovative financing in scaling up implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Co-moderated by **Andrea Naletto (UNICEF)** and **Yayoi Segi-Vitchek (UNESCO)**, the discussion highlighted the challenges of dwindling funding in fragile and crisis-affected contexts and the need for coordinated, sustainable approaches to ensure safe and inclusive learning for all children.

Ambassador **Josphat K. Maikara**, Director-General for Political and Diplomatic Affairs at Kenya's Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs emphasized that education financing is increasingly strained in fragile contexts, despite Kenya dedicating approximately 20% of its national budget to infrastructure, teacher training, and safe learning environments. Protecting education requires national commitment, community engagement, and coordinated action among all partners to secure learning spaces and ensure that every child can exercise their right to education.

Faiza Hassan, Director of INEE, highlighted the global education landscape's growing pressures, noting that education systems are absorbing multiple shocks while resources decline, particularly in humanitarian contexts. She emphasized the importance of multi-year, flexible funding models, crisis modifiers, and innovative financing approaches, while expanding networks and partnerships to sustain SSD implementation and protection efforts.

Mamadou Kante, Deputy National Director of Fundamental Education in Mali, shared experiences from the Sahel region, where SSD has been domesticated at regional, national, and subnational levels. He stressed the importance of multi-ministerial coordination, engaging defense, justice, gender, and traditional leadership, along with UN agencies and INGOs, to implement guidelines and ensure schools are vacated from military or insurgent occupation. Kante noted persistent funding gaps as a key barrier and underscored the need for flexible, multi-faceted financing to support education in emergencies and effective SSD implementation.



The **Safe to Learn Initiative** was highlighted as a practical model for integrating child protection and safeguarding into education systems, focusing on ending violence in and around schools. **Erica Talentino** from Safe to Learn described its five priority areas—policy and legislation, prevention, social and gender norms change—and noted that 19 countries have committed to these actions to advance safe and inclusive learning environments.

Viola Romano Hassan, Deputy-Director for Gender Equity and Inclusive Education in South Sudan, shared the country’s experience implementing Safe to Learn since 2019. She emphasized that every child, even in crisis, has the right to feel safe while learning, and that the initiative has been nationalized to align with SSD guidelines, equipping teachers to address gender gaps and protect girls’ education. She also noted the need for expanded mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and strong school leadership to sustain meaningful change.

Olga Ambot Inyongo from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) highlighted the role of blended financing, combining domestic and external resources, to support safe, inclusive, and gender-responsive education. She stressed that GPE aligns SSD commitments with SDG 4 goals and actively supports partner countries in mobilizing resources and building partnerships for implementation.

Civil society and floor interventions from states reinforced the session’s themes. Representatives from Sudan emphasized that schools remain open despite ongoing crises, while partnerships and alignment with national institutions are essential to apply resources efficiently. A representative of the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) and SC-Norway highlighted the integration of SSD principles in all-hazard approaches and AU strategies, ensuring children’s voices are central to advancing implementation. Parliamentarians underscored that investment in military expenditure could be redirected to education, climate change, and other safety priorities, while cuts in humanitarian aid represent an indirect attack on education.

The session concluded with a shared recognition that achieving safe, inclusive, and resilient education systems in crisis-affected contexts requires sustained political commitment, multi-stakeholder partnerships, innovative financing, and coordinated national and regional action, ensuring SSD implementation is both practical and transformative.

CLOSING CEREMONY

The closing ceremony marked the culmination of two days of intensive dialogue, commitment-making, and collective action planning. It presented the Nairobi Outcome Document – the key outcome – of the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, which consists of the official co-chairs summary and a voluntary self-assessment tool to guide collective action in protecting education from attack and anchor a common vision for safe, inclusive and resilient education systems.

Closing Remarks and Conclusions

The closing ceremony reflected on the outcomes of the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and emphasized the need to translate commitments into sustained action to protect education during armed conflict and other crises. Moderated by **Mike Gitone**, the session highlighted the voices of children, States, and partners, underscoring that safeguarding education is both a moral and operational imperative.



Children's voices were represented by child experts and activists **Moses Kemboi, Yvone Eipa Kiyana, Ramadhan Ahishakiye Irakoze, Scholah Chebet, and Ibrahim Zanna Sunoma**. The children read their messages to world leaders and demanded action for safe education. Katharina Thon received those messages on behalf of SRSB CAAC and promised to bring these back to the UN.

In a joint intervention, UNESCO and UNICEF, represented by **Louise Haxthausen**, Regional Director of UNESCO, and **Alison Parker**, Deputy Regional Director of UNICEF, reaffirmed that schools must never be battlegrounds, targets, or tools of war. They stressed that accelerating SSD implementation is essential, reminded leaders that education is a lifeline in conflict, and stated that decisions made in Nairobi should guide global action and state-level implementation moving forward.

Cathrine Andersen from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway, reflected on the inspiration from children's voices, noting that their activism imposes an obligation on States and partners to act. She invited participants to join the State-led SSD Implementation Network to sustain progress. **Orlaith Minogue**, Chair of GCPEA, highlighted that children continue to dream and learn despite the impacts of conflict, and that shared responsibility is central to sustaining SSD implementation. She stressed that any plan's effectiveness depends on the determination to act, and that GCPEA will continue to monitor attacks, support implementation, and amplify the voices of affected communities.

Dr. William Sugut, Director, State Department for Basic Education, Kenya presented the following key takeaways from the conference:

1. Political commitments must translate into concrete protection, accountability, and financing measures through strong partnerships.
2. States must domesticate and implement existing frameworks, including SSD, to reflect children's voices and ensure learning protection.
3. Effective protection relies on strong local systems, inclusive participation, and sustained support.
4. SSD implementation has delivered tangible policy progress, including improved monitoring, prevention, and accountability mechanisms.
5. Innovative multisectoral approaches and peer learning strengthen SSD implementation.
6. Gender-responsive measures, including gender-disaggregated data, are essential to ensure equitable access to education.
7. Preventing military use of schools requires training, guidance, and enforcement.
8. Accountability for attacks on education depends on robust legal frameworks, political will, and national partnerships.
9. Sustaining SSD implementation requires financing and locally-led, community-driven partnerships.



Anne Wang’ombe, Principal Secretary, State Department for Gender, Kenya, expressed gratitude to all participants and renewed hope, acknowledging the support of co-organizers, participating States, and children whose voices guided the conference.

Finally, **Ambassador Professor Julius Bitok**, CBS, Principal Secretary for the State Department for Basic Education in Kenya officially closed the conference. His intervention highlighted the centrality of education and child protection in conflict settings and the importance of using data, partnerships, and SSD frameworks to strengthen compliance with IHL, IHRL, and national accountability mechanisms. He reaffirmed Kenya’s support for the SSD and called on all states to join this initiative.

The session concluded with a shared commitment to action, emphasizing that the conference’s outcomes must be translated into tangible, sustainable measures to protect children, ensure safe learning environments, and uphold the SSD and global education rights commitments in the years to come.





5TH
INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON THE
SAFE SCHOOLS
DECLARATION

*Safe Education for All:
A Decade of Commitment,
A Call to Action through
the Safe Schools Declaration.*



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

 **Norway**



Ministry of Foreign
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Trade and Worship
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Save the Children

