



Open Letter from children: We need safe schools in the Sahel Now!

To: The President of the African Union

To: The Governments of Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad via the Ministers of Education and the Minister of Gender/Women Affairs

To: The Regional Institutions (ECCAS, ECOWAS)

To: The UN Representatives (particularly UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women)

To: The International Community via the President of the European Commission

To: The Members of Armed Forces

To: All Community Leaders, and the People of Sahel

We, the Children in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, represent the over 8 million children who have been forced out of school due to armed attacks on education.

"One day we were at school and people came to tell us to close the school. They gave us time to leave and said if they came back and found anyone at the school, they would kill them," 13-year-old girl, Burkina Faso.

"I was in the second grade, armed bandits warned us to close the schools." 11-year-old, girl Mali.

We are faced with sexual violence by armed groups in school, on the routes leading to school and in some cases girls and female teachers are adducted. The recruited or abducted female students and teachers are used as "wives", or forced to play other roles in supporting military operations. For boys they are targeted and recruited as armed fighters.

For girls when we drop out of school, even for short periods, we are forced into child marriage. The situation has worsened with the advent of COVID-19 which has forced us to stay at home and also led to many of our friends becoming pregnant. We are partnering with the Joining Forces members to **call for Safe schools in the Sahel Now** and ask for the following actions to be taken urgently!

"I am proud to be associated with this open letter because I have already written a letter to the Governor in my area with a heart full of sadness asking him to do everything possible to send my friends and I, who are out of school due to insecurity, back to school to ensure a better tomorrow for us"
Fatoumata A, 14-year-old girl from Mali.

On behalf of all children in the Sahel, we, the children, particularly the girls in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad in partnership with Joining Forces West and Central Africa, would like to call:

- * All governments to endorse, implement, and support the Safe Schools Declaration, including by allocating adequate resources for its implementation.
- * All parties to armed conflict to immediately cease unlawful attacks on schools and universities, and along routes to school. This includes ceasing specific abuses against female students, teachers and other education personnel.
- * Governments to invest in and ensure that appropriate alternative learning programs are made available to all students who are out of school due to armed conflict and insecurity

- * Schools occupied by armed forces and armed groups during the pandemic should be vacated and repaired.
- * For our governments to take special measures to ensure girls are protected and feel safe in and around our schools free of sexual abuse just because they are girls.
- * For more commitment of all our Government to protect our school. Because without education we cannot learn. We are the right to education for every child. Please hold us to enjoy our right.
- * The governments to facilitate the return of our displaced children to their localities because they are better off at home.
- * The religious leaders to preach non-violence and religious tolerance.
- * The traditional chiefs to sensitize their communities to live together better because we have the right to education and protection.

**We would like to see all our friends in safe school.
Please do your best for safe school.**

Thank you,

Children in Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad in partnership with Joining Forces West and Central Africa on behalf of all children in the Sahel

*The names of Children in this Open Letter have been changed to protect the identity of the respondents



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For All Children