



# Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use

Global Coalition to  
Protect Education from Attack





## Around the world, schools and universities are ending up on the battlefield.

In the majority of countries with armed conflicts in recent years, armed forces and non-state armed groups have used schools and universities for military purposes.

They have converted schools into barracks and military bases by stacking assault rifles in hallways, hiding grenades under desks, and parking armored vehicles in gymnasiums. They have filled classrooms with sleeping cots and encircled playing fields with barbed wire. And they have established fortifications atop school buildings, in order to better observe and shoot enemy forces.



Rebel fighters are shown how to use an anti-aircraft gun during training held at a secondary school in Benghazi, Libya, March 1, 2011

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An assault rifle left inside a classroom of a school occupied by soldiers in Chocó State, Colombia. Colombia's internal armed conflict has long resulted in serious abuses by irregular armed groups, including guerillas and successor groups to government-backed paramilitaries.

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**Between 2005 and 2013, national armed forces and non-state armed groups used schools and universities in at least 24 countries in conflicts across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South America.**

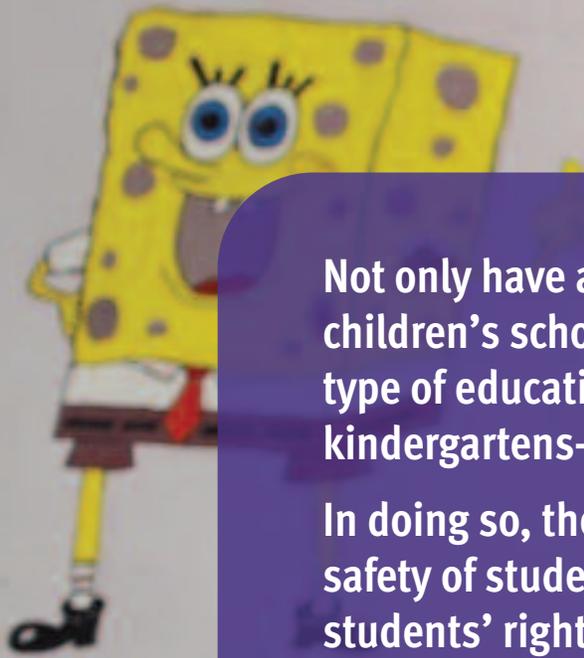
Schools and universities have been used as:

- Bases
- Barracks
- Detention facilities
- Interrogation and torture centers
- Defensive or offensive positions
- Observation posts
- Military training facilities
- Weapons and ammunition storage

Using a school or university for a military purpose can convert it into a legitimate military target under international humanitarian law (the laws of war), making students, teachers, and education facilities vulnerable to attack from belligerent forces.

Military use of schools and universities can result in:

- Death or injury to students, teachers, and school staff
- Damage or destruction to education buildings and support structures, requiring expensive reconstruction and rehabilitation
- Long-term school closures
- Displacement of students to schools away from their home communities
- Declines in student attendance, enrollment, and rates of transition to higher levels
- Declines in availability of teachers
- Negative psychosocial impacts on students, teachers, and communities
- Disproportionate impacts on girls



Not only have armed soldiers and fighters taken children's schools by force, they have also used every type of educational facility—from universities to kindergartens—for military purposes.

In doing so, they have often endangered the lives and safety of students and teachers, and imperiled these students' right to education.

*"Some men came to our village. I tried to escape, but they took me to jail. Except it wasn't a jail—it was my old school. It's ironic—they took me there to torture me, in the same place I used to go to school to learn... They had taken over the school and made it into a torture center."*

KHALID, 15, SYRIA





Fighters from the Syrian opposition rest at a disused primary school in the center of Syria's embattled northern city of Aleppo, July 25, 2012.

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**During times of armed conflict and insecurity, students' access to schooling can provide important protection.**

Safe schools provide life-saving information, mitigate the psycho-social impact of war, and can protect children from trafficking, sexual violence, and recruitment by armed groups. But perhaps more importantly, access to a safe space to learn offers a sense of normalcy, routine, and calm amid the chaos of war.

Boys at Tankuppa High School in Bihar, India, where paramilitary police have been stationed since Maoist guerillas bombed and destroyed the local police station in 2006. Brick sentry boxes added to the school by the paramilitary police are visible on the school roof.

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*“[The paramilitary police based at the school] take baths in front of the girls and in front of us in their underwear, which is not appropriate in our culture... Sometimes these police are teasing the girls too.”*

HETAL, 15, INDIA

# MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

 Countries where armed forces or non-state armed groups used schools or universities between 2005 and 2012.

 Examples of good practice protecting schools and universities from military use, in legislation, military doctrine, court rulings, or policy.

**UNITED NATIONS**  
“Schools shall not be used by the military in their operations.” [UN Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion Manual, 2012.](#)

[UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) called for an end to armed forces using schools in Colombia, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Thailand in [2010 and 2012.](#)

**NICARAGUA**  
University campuses are inviolable. Public forces can only enter them with written authorization from the university authorities. [Law on Institutions of Higher Education, 1990.](#)

**COLOMBIA**  
It is a violation for a commander to allow his troops to occupy a school, which causes an imminent risk to a child’s protection. [Order of General Commander of Military Forces, 2010.](#)

Prevent security forces from entering schools for trainings, to mount weapons, or to deploy armed personnel. [Constitutional Court, 1999.](#)

**COLOMBIA**  
Both government security forces and non-state armed groups have used schools. In April 2011, **300 children** were trapped by a confrontation between FARC-EP guerillas and military forces who had set up tents in a school’s soccer field.

**IRELAND**  
Military manoeuvres and encampments cannot interfere with schools or school grounds. [Defence Act, 1954.](#)

**UNITED KINGDOM**  
“The better view” is that the law prohibits the use of education institutions for purposes likely to expose it to damage, unless there is no feasible alternative. [Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict, 2004.](#)

**ARGENTINA**  
Public forces cannot enter national universities without prior written order from a court or a request from the university. [Higher Education Act, 1995.](#)

**COTE D’IVOIRE**  
UN and NGOs shared information on military use of schools with UN peacekeepers who then advocated with state and non-state actors to leave occupied schools.

**SOUTH SUDAN**

In 2011, troops used at least **21 schools**, affecting approximately **10,900 children**. The cost to repair damage caused by such use was around **US\$67,000** per school.

**YEMEN**

In 2010, Houthi rebels occupied dozens of schools in northern Yemen, preventing at least **30,000 children** from attending.

In 2011, armed forces and non-state armed groups occupied at least **54 schools** in Sanaa.

**AFGHANISTAN**

In 2011, there were at least **31 incidents** of opposition groups and pro-government forces using schools. This rivals the number of schools burned down during the same period, which was 35.

**THAILAND**

In 2010, government forces used at least **79 schools** for camps and barracks in southern Thailand, endangering and imperiling the education of an estimated **20,500 students**.

**INDIA**

During 2010, security forces used more than **129 schools**, disrupting studies for an estimated **20,800 students**.

**NEPAL**

“No armed activities in the school premises and in its periphery.” *Ministry of Education Guidelines, 2011.*

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

In 2013, armed groups occupied **64 schools** in Katanga province alone. Schools were also used in North and South Kivu.

**SOUTH SUDAN**

Occupation of schools is “deplorable” and in “violation of our law.” *Order of Army Deputy Chief of Staff, 2012.*

**INDIA**

Ensure that schools “are not allowed to be occupied by the armed or security forces in future for whatsoever purpose” *Supreme Court, 2010.*

**BURMA/MYANMAR**

Two non-state armed groups publicly committed to avoid using schools for military purposes in 2012.

**THE PHILIPPINES**

Schools “shall not be utilized for military purposes such as command posts, barracks, detachments, and supply depots.” *Special Protection of Children Act, 1992.*



Soldiers from the Iraqi Ground Forces Command sleep in the playground area of an abandoned school on July 31, 2005 in Fallujah, Iraq.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

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- ***Recognize the Incidence and Impact of Military Use:*** Governments, non-state armed groups, and other actors—such as international financial institutions and intergovernmental bodies—should acknowledge that military use of schools and other education institutions is a common practice in armed conflict that requires a concerted response at both the national and international levels.
- ***Adhere to International Law:*** All parties to an armed conflict should take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects, including schools and universities, against the effects of attacks, and to respect and ensure students’ security and right to education under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. At a minimum, this means prohibiting the military use of schools and universities while they continue to be used as education institutions.
- ***Monitor and Report:*** Local organizations, states, and relevant international agencies and mechanisms should give greater attention to monitoring and reporting on military use of schools and education institutions, including higher education campuses, whenever it occurs.
- ***Take Preventive Measures:*** Ministries of Education, Defense, and Foreign Affairs should coordinate to establish preventive measures to avoid military use of schools and universities, or to quickly return them to their original use.
- ***Improve Negotiations:*** United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations experienced in negotiating with national armed forces and armed groups to stop or prevent their use of schools and universities, should evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts and share their good practice.
- ***Seek Accountability:*** Governments should credibly and impartially investigate and prosecute, in accordance with international standards, those individuals who use schools and universities in a manner that violates international humanitarian law. Those that have restrictive domestic legislation should hold accountable those who violate these laws. Organizations that have successfully brought domestic court cases ordering armed forces out of schools should advise others interested in pursuing such strategies.
- ***Strengthen Legal Standards:*** Armed forces should amend their military manuals, train their personnel, and issue military orders in line with good practice, including by prohibiting armed forces from using schools and universities. Those that have already done this should share their good practice with other countries. Legislators should enact legislation in line with good practice to prohibit use of schools and universities by national armed forces and armed groups.

# ACTION: Developing International Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use

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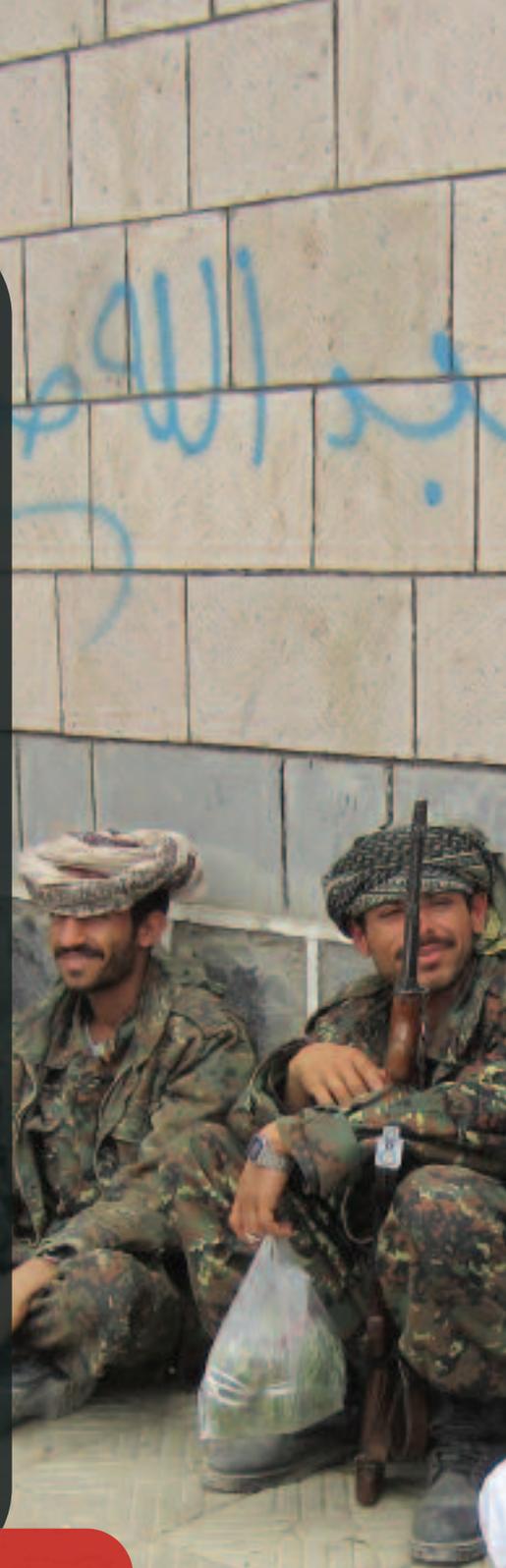
In May 2012, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack initiated a multi-year international expert consultative process to discuss strategies for protecting schools and universities from military use, including the development of international guidelines. Participants have included representatives from governments, militaries, UN agencies, and international humanitarian and human rights inter-governmental and nongovernmental organizations, some of which have direct and indirect contact with non-state armed groups.

This process identified the urgent need for clear and simple guidance on the obligations of armed forces to protect students' and teachers' safety, and the right to education during times of conflict. The guidelines will assist:

- Soldiers in their decision-making during battlefield situations and other military operations.
- Commanders and military planners in preparing ahead to lessen the need to use and endanger schools.
- Governments and international and domestic organizations in monitoring and assessing the conduct of national armed forces and armed groups; negotiating with parties to a conflict using schools; and mitigating the harmful consequences when parties to a conflict do use schools.

*“When [the troops] tortured the old man here, we got very scared. They beat him and electrocuted him right in the courtyard of the school. It was during recess.”*

AHLAM, 13, YEMEN





A girl student leaves al-Furadh School at the end of the day, in Sanaa, Yemen. Soldiers sit and chew qat, a mild intoxicant, outside the school walls. For several months, soldiers lived in the third-floor classrooms, putting the students at risk of attack and disrupting their education.

© 2012 Priyanka Motaparthi/Human Rights Watch



## CALL FOR SUPPORT

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The Global Coalition is working with expert partners to finalize new international guidelines to better protect schools and universities from use by armed forces and armed groups, and then to disseminate them broadly and work for their implementation. We welcome your support and invite you to contact our Secretariat for further information.

peuvent pas demander un verre d'eau au foyer.  
s'opposaient de l'habitation.  
sa femme, Lokumba était très riche et très  
ne supportait pas le pauvre.



Two soldiers sit in a school in the town of Mutongo, Democratic Republic of Congo, December 4, 2004.

© 2004 AP Photo/Riccardo Gangale

# Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack



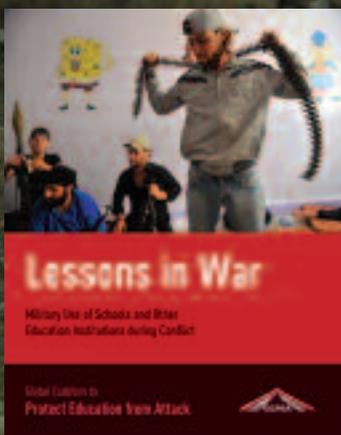
The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack is an inter-agency coalition formed in 2010 to address targeted attacks on students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflict. It is led by a steering committee comprised of eight international organizations: Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, Education Above All, Human Rights Watch, Institute of International Education, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR.

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For more information please read the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's report *Lessons in War: Military Use of Schools and Other Education Institutions during Conflict* available at <http://www.protectingeducation.org/lessons-in-war>



Loi Sam's secondary school, located at the heart of the Nawagai Valley in Pakistan near the Afghan border, was destroyed during fighting with Taliban insurgents who had commandeered it as a stronghold. The compound was then taken over by the Baloch Battalion of the Bajaur Scouts and used as a "forward operating base" in Pakistan's front line against Islamist insurgents

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*“I had nothing against the soldiers when they were outside the school... But when they moved into the school, I feared there would be an attack on the school, so ... I withdrew my children... If there was a hit on the grounds, the children would be hit.”*

THE MOTHER OF TWO CHILDREN WHOSE SCHOOL WAS PARTIALLY OCCUPIED BY GOVERNMENT PARAMILITARY FORCES. PATTANI, THAILAND

A student at Ban Samala Elementary School, Pattani, Thailand. An army unit had set up base in a part of the main school building and on the school grounds.

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