

# Technical Guide: What Teachers and School Administrators Can Do to Protect Education from Attack

## OVERVIEW

Schools and universities should be safe places of learning, yet UN agencies, international organizations, local and international media, and other sources continue to report cases of education under attack. Across situations of conflict and insecurity, armed forces and armed groups destroy and damage schools, and threaten, recruit, exploit, injure, torture, and even kill students and education personnel while they are in school, or en route to and from school. Parties to armed conflict also use schools and universities as barracks and bases, for weapons storage, as detention centers, and for other military purposes, jeopardizing the safety of students and staff and forcing schools to close for varying periods of time. In the long term, such attacks on education and military use of schools impede student attendance and enrollment, inhibit learning, diminish the quality of education, and reduce the numbers of people who are qualified as teachers. They obstruct children's right to education, and weaken education systems, hindering long term development.

A multitude of actors share responsibility for protecting schools, including national governments, ministries of education and other related government departments, local governments, local leaders, communities, parents, school administrators, and teachers. In October 2016, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) launched the report *"What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack"* which provides those actors with recommendations, country examples and case studies, considerations regarding risks and challenges, and lessons learned. This document extracts from the full report in order to serve as a technical guide for ministries of education, local education officials, communities, NGOs, and international agencies seeking to develop localized templates on actions that school-based actors can take to protect schools, students, and teachers from attack. Developing localized guidance is important. Existing resources discuss measures to protect education at the policy level, but teachers, school administrators, and other education personnel at the local level are most directly responsible for formulating and implementing measures to protect schools from attack.

This technical guide follows the organization of the full report, outlining how teachers and school administrators can protect education by implementing protective measures in their schools. All measures should be adapted to local contexts, considering factors such as the forms of attack that occur and their possible motivations, national resources, and cultural practices. Not all measures are appropriate in all situations.

These measures are organized into seven categories:

1. Unarmed Physical Protection Measures
2. Armed Physical Protection Measures
3. Negotiations as a Strategy to Protect Education
4. Early Warning/Alert Systems
5. Alternative Delivery of Education
6. Psychosocial Support
7. Comprehensive School-based Safety and Security Plans

## 1. Unarmed Physical Protection

Unarmed physical protection measures shield schools and learning spaces from attack, minimize the damage from attacks, and allow school communities to defend themselves without using weapons or force. Measures include:

Protecting physical infrastructure:

- Harden the school, or make it more resilient to physical threat, such as explosions, armed conflict, or civil unrest:
  - Reinforce windows with blast film, heavy curtains, or bars
  - Reinforce doors with bolts or other heavy materials
  - Reinforce buildings with sandbags or other materials
  - Install razor wire on tops of school walls
  - Put in place barriers or create distance between the road and school
  - Conceal the schools by building boundary walls or fences, or planting shrubbery
- Establish a safe room – a designated hardened room or space where staff and students can shelter during an incident. The room should include medical supplies, modes of communication, little to no glass, heavy walls, a lockable and reinforced door, food, water, and blankets. It should be located on a floor that is close to the ground.
- Install safety and security equipment (e.g. security cameras and metal detectors).
- When applicable, the school’s physical building should be an underground structure (warehouse) or other sheltered area, for example, to minimize shelling damage and maintain a low profile from possible attacks.
- The school’s location should be determined through discussion with local community leaders. Once decided upon, keep the location as confidential as possible, including by abstaining from publishing or otherwise advertising it on Facebook or other social media platforms.

Protective presence:

- Install an unarmed security guard at the gate of the school.
- Improve safety for students walking to and from school, for example by establishing a “buddy” system or meeting points where children can gather and walk to school together (sometimes called a “walking school bus”).
- Enlist the support of community members, principals, or parents to serve as escorts accompanying students and teachers to and from school.
- Collect parents’/guardians’ contact information and set up a phone tree to notify parents of any threat, other security concern, and recommendations on keeping their children home from school.
- With the agreement of the school principal and local ministry of education officials, enlist local leaders to act as school “supervisors” and encourage them to check schools for possible threats on a regular basis.

Housing solutions:

- Make boarding houses available on campus to teachers and students if this might reduce the risk of travel on dangerous routes to and from school. Consider seeking community funding for these houses as a way to garner community support and protection. Take into account the needs of the most marginalized members of the community when establishing boarding houses.

Community education and engagement:

- Carry out an awareness-raising campaign with members of the community to educate them about the risk of attacks on schools, military use of schools, and other relevant issues.
- Use various forms of media to make public service announcements about risks to schools and what members of the community can do to support school safety.

Protect against school-related gender-based violence:

- Establish a system in the school where children can be referred to professionals if they face the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), and a system for safe reporting of incidents.

For additional guidance on physical protection measures, see INEE, *Guidance Notes on Safer School Construction*.

## ***2. Armed Physical Protection***

Armed guards and patrols can protect teachers, students, and school buildings and infrastructure, as well as provide them with a means of self-defense. While some schools have privately engaged armed guards, in most cases schools have coordinated such measures with ministries, local police and security forces, local community leaders, councils, or other government entities. However, these measures should be used with caution since they may have the opposite effect of endangering children, rather than protecting them, and of impeding their access to education, rather than preserving it. Enlisting armed guards or using armored vehicles for transport may appear to militarize schooling, putting both students and teachers at risk of becoming targets for the opposing side. In some cases, the presence of armed guards may make children more vulnerable. Soldiers or enlisted guards may harass children, sexually assault them, or recruit them as fighters. Parents may be less willing to send their children, especially their girls, to school if armed guards are present. Where possible, unarmed civilian protection is recommended over the use of armed guards and patrols. If armed guards are used, however, measures should be put in place to ensure that they protect, instead of endanger, children. For example, the use of armed guards or escorts should be limited to the times of day or year when schools are most at risk. Armed guards should be based in an area that minimizes their contact and interaction with children, and they should be trained in child protection practices.

### 3. *Negotiations as a Strategy to Protect Education*

School and community leaders can negotiate agreements with parties to armed conflict, including government forces and non-state armed groups, so that they refrain from attacking schools or using them for military purposes. These negotiations may take place at the national or community level, with intervention by a third party as agreed by all stakeholders. While those in leadership positions will typically carry out such negotiations, teachers and school administrators should be sensitized to possible risks involved in the negotiation process, such as appearing to support one party or another. They should take measures to ensure the school is recognized as a neutral space. More specifically, education personnel could:

- Keep buildings free from political signs and writing, or any other unrelated material, and refrain from political campaigning or other political activities on school grounds since these can make a school appear partisan. Limit activities to school or school-related purposes and ensure that education is conflict-sensitive.
- Ensure school vehicles (if applicable) are used only by authorized personnel for authorized purposes.
- Encourage teachers and school administrators to be calm, polite, and professional when speaking, writing, and relating to others, even when provoked.
- Support the development of codes of conduct along these lines, regarding, for example, the usage of schools and school property and the behavior of teachers and school administrators. All parties should agree to codes of conduct.
- Introduce or strengthen existing teacher codes of conduct to include measures and sanctions related to GBV. GBV often makes school dangerous for girls even in times of peace, and the risk of GBV often increases in times of conflict.
- Ensure that school administrators and teachers are aware of whether their state has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, thereby committing to implement the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.
- Ensure also that school administrators and teachers are aware of national legislation or military doctrine that restricts military use of schools so that they can highlight these safeguards with government authorities if armed parties seek to use the school for military purposes.
- For additional information about protection of schools from military use, including implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, refer to GCPEA's *Commentary on the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

## 4. Early Warning/Alert Systems

Effective Early Warning Systems can, in some cases, ensure that children and staff are removed from harm before attacks occur. Schools can work either independently or in coordination with government ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, local councils, and community leaders to implement early warning or alert systems to communicate in real time about threats or attacks on schools. This can enable education communities to temporarily close schools, transfer students to schools in safer areas, or provide alternative delivery of education. While teachers and school administrators should not be solely responsible for establishing and maintaining these systems, they could:

- Establish a network between school administrators, school safety committees, families, local ministries, and security forces through which SMS messages and safety warnings can be conveyed.
- Link the communication network to a local service that could trigger emergency assistance and other response mechanisms. The communications network might take place via radio, phone tree, mobile text message, etc.
- Carry out occasional drills to ensure all aspects of the early warning system are functioning effectively.

## 5. Alternative Delivery of Education

In situations in which it is unsafe to continue education in formal schools, education can be provided through alternative means. Where possible and safe, decisions about alternative means of education should be made in collaboration with community members, NGOs, and government ministries. School-based contingency plans should include plans for alternative delivery of education. Local actions could include the following:

- Relocate places where education is delivered, such as to homes, community buildings, places of worship or other community sites. Relocation should be carefully considered, however, since these spaces are often also targeted in contexts where education is attacked.
- Establish smaller community-based or home-based schools in villages to minimize risks for education personnel and students traveling to and from larger schools in nearby towns.
- Make changes to school schedules so that education personnel and students can avoid traveling to and from school during peak times of risk. These may include altering the times of day or year when classes are offered.
- Set up temporary learning spaces either in response to threats or following actual attacks.
- Provide opportunities for self-learning and distance-learning such as:
  - self-learning worksheets
  - online learning programs
  - radio and television learning
- For additional guidance on alternative delivery of education, see UNICEF School-in-a-Box User Manuals.

## 6. Psychosocial Support

Students, education personnel, and students' guardians should receive mental health and social support when they experience targeted attacks on schools or frequent or ongoing exposure to conflict outside school. Psychosocial support should incorporate appropriate community, cultural, and religious healing practices and should include establishing referral systems for children and adults who may need specialized mental health services.

To provide psychosocial support at the school level, education communities could:

Create child- and youth-friendly learning environments

- Train and support teachers to adopt methods of instruction that are participatory, inclusive, gender-sensitive, and conflict-sensitive, as well as approaches to psychosocial support (e.g. drawing, role play, dance, and song) that can help build students' ability to cope. Drawing, games, role play, dance, and song can be used in non-formal learning spaces or in schools to help students to express their emotions and experiences, grow cognitively and emotionally, play, and develop related skills. Teachers should be trained in identifying students in need of specialized support and case management.

Establish referral systems

- Establish systems in schools to refer students to specialized mental health or social services, and ensure that students coping with severe stress or trauma receive appropriate support.

Provide services for survivors of GBV

- Ensure that survivors of GBV have access to healthcare workers who can provide psychological first aid and basic mental or physical health support.

Develop codes of conduct

- Establish school-based codes of conduct with guidelines for acceptable behavior for teachers and students to promote safe, supportive, non-violent learning environments. In many contexts, the ministry of education should already have codes of conduct for teachers in place. These should be referred to and reviewed before developing any new code of conduct.
- For teachers, codes of conduct could include prohibitions on corporal punishment and GBV, as well as principles for ensuring child-friendly learning environments.
- For students, codes of conduct could address issues of respect and empathy for other students, and how to avoid harassment and fighting.

Implement measures to assist teachers

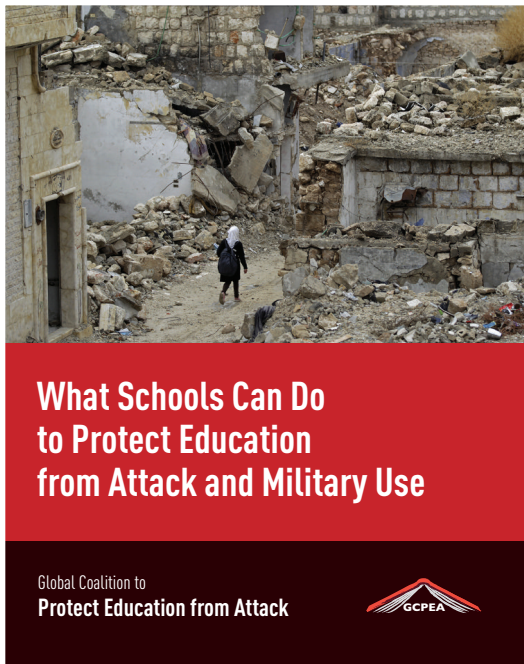
- Ensure that teachers – both women and men – continue to receive regular pay and the support they need to be able to teach students, including psychosocial support.
- Provide regular breaks for teachers throughout the school day.
- Encourage regular staff meetings.
- Provide teachers and other education personnel with safe transportation to and from school, particularly for female staff.

For additional guidance on psychosocial support, see:

- International Rescue Committee, Healing Classrooms – Tools
- International Rescue Committee, Safe Healing and Learning Spaces Toolkit – Social and Emotional Learning Lesson Bank
- Save the Children, Psychological First Aid for Children: Toolkit and Manual

## 7. Comprehensive School-based Safety and Security Plans

Comprehensive school safety plans can be developed at the school level with the support of the appropriate government ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, local councils, and community leaders. A contingency plan could also be adapted to fit the local context, using a planning template developed at the central government level, if one exists. In order to be effective, plans require strong leadership from principals and school management committees, with active community, parent, and student participation. Plans should incorporate measures to be taken before, during, and after an incident, as highlighted above. Plans may also include processes for reporting on violations that occur. Many of the measures described above can be incorporated into a strategic and comprehensive approach to safety and security planning.



For more information on how to protect education during armed conflict, please refer to GCPEA's publication *What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack*

[http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf)



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

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

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

GCPEA is a coalition of organizations that includes:

The Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), Human Rights Watch, The Institute of International Education, Norwegian Refugee Council, The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC, a program of Education Above All), Save the Children, The Scholars at Risk Network, The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), War Child Holland

GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

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

### **Acknowledgements**

GCPEA gratefully acknowledges the generous support of PEIC, a project of Education Above All, UNICEF, and an anonymous donor, for preparation of the paper *What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use*, (the Schools paper), published by GCPEA in September 2016 and written by Melinda Smith, GCPEA consultant. This paper was prepared by Caroline Keenan, drawing extensively from the Schools paper.

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

Secretariat

350 5th Avenue, 34th Floor

New York, New York 10118-3299

Phone: 1.212.377.9446

Email: [GCPEA@protectingeducation.org](mailto:GCPEA@protectingeducation.org)

**[www.protectingeducation.org](http://www.protectingeducation.org)**