



Concept Note

Third International Conference on Safe Schools

Palace of Congress, Palma, Mallorca, Spain

27-29 May 2019

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Background

The [Safe Schools Declaration](#) is a political commitment to better protect students, teachers, schools, and universities during armed conflict. The Declaration was drafted through a consultative process led by Norway and Argentina and was opened for state endorsement at an international conference held in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015.

Governments that endorse the Declaration make a commitment to take concrete steps such as improve reporting of attacks on education; investigate and prosecute alleged war crimes involving schools; and restore access to education faster when schools are attacked.

Endorsing states also commit to use the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#) (hereafter referred to as the *Guidelines*), a non-binding practical tool that offers guidance to help parties to conflict exercise restraint with respect to the use of schools and universities for military purposes, thus helping to better safeguard the civilian character of such facilities.

Support for the Safe Schools Declaration has come from the highest levels of the United Nations, notably the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres; the former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; and the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, each of whom has urged all UN member states to endorse the Declaration.

The need for better protection of education in conflict is, unfortunately, more pressing than ever. Research recently released by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)*, and published in [Education under Attack 2018](#), shows that deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on schools and universities, their students, and staff have become more widespread over the last five years, with



more than 12,700 attacks occurring from 2013 through 2017 and harming more than 21,000 students and educators. A pattern of attacks on schools occurred in at least 28 countries experiencing armed conflict and insecurity.

Within the same timeframe, armed forces and armed groups used schools and universities for military purposes such as bases, barracks, firing positions, armories, and detention centres in at least 29 countries experiencing armed conflict around the world. By potentially turning schools into military targets, this practice can endanger students' and teachers' safety and hinder access to education.

Girls and women may be differently impacted by attacks on education and military use of schools, including because parents are particularly wary of sending their daughters to school when there is the risk of violence. In at least 18 countries worldwide, women and girls were targets of attacks on education because of their gender, including through sexual violence.

To date, [86](#) countries from around the world have joined the Safe Schools Declaration.

Overall Aim

The government of Spain will host the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in 2019, building on the previous conferences in Oslo in 2015, and Buenos Aires in 2017. The 2019 conference will discuss challenges and lessons learned, and will further consolidate examples of good practice in implementation at the national, regional, and international levels. It will offer a forum for participants to share experiences, raise awareness, and increase the visibility of the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines*. Furthermore, it will be an occasion to encourage future cooperation and deeper gender-responsive implementation of the Declaration and the *Guidelines*.

Specific Objectives

The Third International Conference on Safe Schools will provide a platform for exchange, and has the following specific objectives:

- Draw global attention to the problem of attacks on students, teachers, and educational facilities, as well as military use of schools and universities during armed conflict;
- Provide the opportunity for more states to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and commit to use the *Guidelines* in order to protect education and better safeguard the civilian character of schools;
- Offer a dedicated space for exchange to review the progress achieved at the national level, share examples of lessons learned regarding key areas of implementation, and discuss challenges;
- Stimulate stronger responses and encourage deeper, gender-responsive implementation of the Declaration commitments;
- Gather concrete information on good practice in implementation to serve as positive examples to other states considering endorsement and implementation; and
- Define the next steps for attaining universal endorsement and effective implementation of the Declaration and *Guidelines*, including by reviewing advocacy strategies and continuing to promote the standards set by the Declaration and *Guidelines*.



Participation

UN N member states will be invited to the Third International Conference on Safe Schools. Speakers will be invited at Ministerial level, while general participation is aimed at Director-General level. Both endorsing and non-endorsing states will be invited to attend. The host will invite representatives from the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, and, in certain cases, Education.

- Representatives of endorsing states will be encouraged to provide updates on implementation at the national level.
- Representatives of states that have not yet endorsed the Declaration will be encouraged to reflect upon the issue of protecting education within their own context and consider endorsement.

Representatives of international organisations, international non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations will also be invited to attend the conference.

Child Participation

Short videos with children's testimonies will be shown throughout the conference to ensure representation of children's voices.

Outcome Documents

- *Chair's Summary*: a brief account of the discussions during the conference will be presented by Spain as the conference host.
- *Conference Report*: a report summarizing progress on implementation and examples of good practice presented at the meeting, will serve as a resource and advocacy tool to support further endorsements and implementation.

Day 1

Day 1 will have a high-level opening segment, followed by two thematic panel discussions. Each panel will be composed of a moderator from an endorsing state, a panellist from a conflict-affected endorsing state, and representatives of civil society and international organizations.

During the open discussions following each panel, participants will be encouraged to share updates on the development and implementation of national legislation, national-level policy, national and regional education protection plans, and international cooperation and assistance to support the prevention of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure, and the provision of protective, safe, conflict-sensitive education.

Thematic Areas

There will be two dedicated high-level panels for deeper discussion of the following thematic areas:

- 1) The gendered impact of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure; and
- 2) Monitoring, reporting, and accountability for attacks on students, teachers, schools and universities.

Panel 1: The gendered impact of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure



The first panel will be a discussion of how girls, women, boys, and men are differently affected by attacks on education and/or military use of schools and universities, and how to respond to their specific needs. In addition, the gender lens discussions will address violations that are linked to attacks on education and military use of schools, such as sexual violence and child recruitment. This discussion will be linked to progress against Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, and 16, and to the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Education is critical for gender equality. Lower levels of female education, in particular, are linked to higher rates of maternal and infant mortality while, conversely, there is some evidence that having a higher level of education increases women's power in household decision-making. Similarly, access to safe education for women and girls is an important step to removing the obstacles that impede women's full participation in politics, conflict prevention, peace and transitional justice processes.

Girls and women may be differently impacted by attacks on education and military use of schools. In at least 18 countries worldwide, women and girls were targets of attacks on education because of their gender, including incidents of sexual violence in educational settings, and attacks aimed at repressing or stopping learning or teaching by girls and women.

Attacks on education have devastating, immediate, and lifelong physical and psychosocial consequences, including impacts that are distinct to each gender. There is evidence that girls who leave school early are less likely than boys to return to learning and may instead be forced to marry. In some contexts, families prioritize the education of boys over that of girls; this may mean that girls' education suffers when the financial cost of keeping children safe on the way to or in school becomes prohibitive.

The UN Secretary-General highlighted the negative impact of conflicts and emergencies on girls' access to education in his [2017 report](#) on women, peace, and security, noting that girls in conflict countries are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than those in non-conflict settings. He also highlighted the role of education in protecting girls and young women from violations, including human trafficking and early and child marriage.

To facilitate gender-responsive implementation of the Declaration, GCPEA has produced a set of [recommendations](#) for states to consider when seeking to implement each commitment in a way that will better protect women and girls. These recommendations are based on a GCPEA [case study](#) in Nigeria on how women and girls are impacted by attacks on education and military use of schools.

At the same time, in some contexts, boys may be more vulnerable to the impact of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure. For example, according to Child Soldiers International, boys make up approximately 70% of children recruited to participate in hostilities as child soldiers.

Children are sometimes recruited while they are at or on their way to or from school. Limitations in data collection make it difficult to assess the extent to which schools served as locales for child recruitment, but GCPEA found reports of child recruitment in the context of education in 16 of the countries profiled in *Education Under Attack 2018*.



Boys may also be more likely to be targeted to prevent them from fighting or being recruited by opposing forces. GCPEA has gathered data indicating that, in some incidents, armed groups targeted schools, separated the boys from the girls, and abducted or killed the boys.

A child soldier is a child associated with an armed force or armed group and refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to boys and girls used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.

Speakers on this panel will outline some of the ways in which different genders and age groups are more vulnerable to the risk and impact of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure. They will outline the work of their organization in relation to this topic, and share examples of good practice in better preventing or responding to the risks and impacts.

Panel 2: Monitoring, reporting, and accountability for attacks on students, teachers, and schools

The second panel will be a discussion of the preventive role of monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms that address attacks on education.

The panel will include discussion of ways to enhance data collection on attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure, including disaggregating data, in order to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education. This will also include a discussion on responding to the needs of victims.

A wide range of actors are involved in monitoring and reporting, including UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations, human rights and monitoring organizations, media, national education authorities, peacekeepers, and, on occasion, members of armed groups and armed forces.

Monitoring and reporting are closely linked to the issue of accountability for attacks on students, teachers, and schools. As such, this panel will include a discussion of how best to encourage investigation of allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and prosecution of perpetrators. It is hoped that the discussion will feed into the High-Level Political Forum review of Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16, due to take place in New York in July 2019.

The GCPEA report, *Education Under Attack*, is the primary source of data for monitoring progress on Sustainable Development Goal thematic indicator 4.a.3 on attacks on students, personnel, and institutions.

Education under Attack 2018 noted that, over the last decade, reporting on attacks on education has improved significantly in many places around the world. Accordingly, analysing trends in attacks is challenging because apparent trends may reflect changes in access to information rather than actual increases or decreases in the number of attacks.

Nevertheless, the overall number of attacks on education documented in *Education under Attack 2018* suggests that violence directed at students, educators, and their institutions increased worldwide between January 2013 and December 2017 compared to the 2009 to mid-2013 period covered in *Education under Attack 2014*.



Strengthened monitoring and reporting mechanisms will better enable the pursuit of accountability for attacks on education. Ideally, data collection methodologies should be standardised, disaggregated, and seek to – insofar as possible – measure the impact, as well as the incidence, of attacks and military use.

Day 2

Day 2 will have a high-level segment, a session with five case studies on implementation of the Declaration and *Guidelines*, followed by a breakout session to conduct a table-top exercise using the *Guidelines*.

Speakers will be invited to discuss concrete measures taken to better protect students, staff, and schools and to reduce the use of educational facilities for military purposes in different conflict-affected countries.

During the high-level segment, representatives of international and non-governmental organisations will outline how the *Guidelines* have contributed to the fulfilment of their mandate, as well as outlining the broader work of their organisations on protection of education.

Case studies from five countries will focus on implementation of the *Guidelines* in military doctrine or training, including discussion of the various operational tools available to support training of militaries on protecting education from attack, and how these can be used.

During the open discussion, the emphasis will be on sharing concrete examples of implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and *Guidelines* at the national, regional, and international level. Civil society experts and international organizations will be invited to contribute to the discussions.

The *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* urge parties to armed conflict (both state armed forces and non-state armed groups) not to use schools and universities for any purpose in support of the military effort.

A core aim of the *Guidelines* is to protect against the risk of armed forces and groups converting schools and universities into military objectives by way of military use and exposing them to the potentially devastating consequences of attack. While it is acknowledged that certain uses would not be contrary to the law of armed conflict, all parties should endeavor to avoid impinging on students' safety and education, using the *Guidelines* as a guide to responsible practice.

The *Guidelines* complement existing international humanitarian and human rights law. While the *Guidelines* do not change the law, they facilitate compliance with the existing law by effecting a change in practice and behavior. They are intended to be used as a tool to raise awareness of the military use of schools among parties to armed conflict, and to facilitate discussions of the broader issues of protection and education in conflict among military forces, governments, and non-governmental organizations.

The *Guidelines* aim to encourage a change in mentality and shift in behavior regarding the military use of schools and universities, through integration into military policies and doctrine, and application of good practice. The implementation of the *Guidelines* should be context-specific and tailored to individual states.



Table-Top Exercise on the *Guidelines*

To facilitate a deeper understanding of how to operationalise the *Guidelines*, the programme will include a table-top exercise on using the *Guidelines*.

Conference participants will be divided into breakout groups, most likely according to language, and invited to respond to a scenario involving military use of schools. The sessions will be led by trainers from international organisations and member states.

Following the breakout session, conference participants will return to plenary for a feedback session. Rapporteurs of each breakout group will provide an account of the table-top exercise, with time for further discussion of the scenarios and sharing of concrete experience in use of the *Guidelines*.

Closing Session

Finally, in the closing session, Spain, as host of the conference, will present the Chair's Summary. The Chair's Summary will give a brief account of the discussions over the two days of the conference and outline next steps in the Safe Schools Declaration process.

Palma Conference on Safe Schools Draft Programme 27-29 May 2019		
Eve of Conference		
7.00pm	Welcome reception	Hosted by the Spanish government and Palma local authorities, with welcome remarks provided by a select number of high-level speakers. Videos of testimonies from children and remarks from select civil society representatives. May include an endorsement ceremony for states that have endorsed the Declaration since the Buenos Aires conference.
Day 1		
8.30am-9.00am	Registration	
9.15am-10.45am	Opening session High-level segment	High-level speakers provide welcome remarks and an overview of the issue, including presentations on the impact of attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure, and a brief overview of the key obligations contained in the Safe Schools Declaration.
10.45am-11.15am	Coffee break	
11.15am-1.15pm	Panel discussion on the gendered impact of attacks on education and the military use of schools and universities	Discussion of how males and females are differently affected by attacks on education and military use of schools and universities and how to respond to their specific needs. In addition, the gender lens discussions will



		address linked violations such as sexual violence and child recruitment. This discussion is linked to progress against Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, and 16, as well as the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
1.15pm-3.15pm	Lunch	
3.15pm-5.15pm	Thematic session on Sustainable Development Goals 4 & 16 and attacks on students, teachers, and schools	Discussion of the preventive role of monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms that address attacks on education. This will include discussion of ways to enhance data collection on attacks on education and military use of educational infrastructure, including disaggregating data, in order to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education. This could also include a focus on responding to the needs of victims. Monitoring and reporting are closely linked to accountability for attacks on students, teachers, and schools, so this panel will include a discussion of how best to encourage investigation of allegations of violations of applicable national and international law, and prosecution of perpetrators.
5.15pm-5.30pm	Wrap-up of Day 1	Remarks provided to sum up the day's discussions and outline the programme for Day 2.
Day 2		
8.30am-9.15am	High-level segment	High-level representatives of international organisations and civil society organisations provide remarks on the relevance and application of the <i>Guidelines</i> in their work.
9.15am-10.30am	Case studies	Five conflict-affected states are invited to share their experience in implementing the <i>Guidelines</i> .
10.30am-10.45pm	Introduction to <i>Guidelines</i> and table-top exercise	Conference participants are reminded of the specific content of the <i>Guidelines</i> and the table-top exercise is explained.
11.00pm-12.45pm	Table-top exercise	Conference participants are divided into breakout groups, most likely according to language, and invited to participate in a table-top exercise using the <i>Guidelines</i> to respond to a scenario involving military use of schools.
1.00pm-2.00pm	Feedback session	Rapporteurs of each breakout session provide an account of the table-top exercise, with time for further discussion of the scenarios and



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		sharing of experience in use of the <i>Guidelines</i> .
2.00pm-2.30 pm	Closing session	Chair's Summary is presented by the conference hosts, and next steps for the Safe Schools Declaration process are outlined.