

"I love going to school because it will enable me to have a job one day. And I also now have friends who I like to play with. It makes me forget the fear I felt with the armed men. One day, I would like to become a nurse to take care of my family."

NABYLA, AGED 13, KAYA, BURKINA FASO



Global Coalition to **Protect**
Education from Attack

A DECADE OF SAFEGUARDING EDUCATION IN ARMED CONFLICT



Global Coalition to **Protect Education from Attack**

GCPEA TEN YEARS ON

In 2010, a group of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations working in the fields of education in emergencies, protection, higher education, and international humanitarian and human rights law united to create the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**. Its goal was to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities during armed conflict. Ten years on, over half of all UN member states have endorsed an international political commitment to safeguard education, and a UN international day to protect education from attack has been established, amongst other significant advances. Lives are being saved and the right to education secured for some of the world's most vulnerable—young people in war zones.

**“School should be safe.
School is my second home.
It is my right to learn in a safe place.”**

LUBNA, A STUDENT IN PALESTINE

“We must remind the world that children have a right to continue to learn unimpeded, even in times of war... The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack is a wonderful vehicle to carry this message through.”

MS. VIRGINIA GAMBA, UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT, MAY 28, 2020



Mr. Josep Borrell, Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Ms. Virginia Gamba, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, at the Third International Conference on Safe Schools, held in Palma de Mallorca, Spain in May, 2019.

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A Yemeni school boy writes as he sits outside a school on March 16, 2017. The school was damaged in an air strike in the southern Yemeni city of Ta'ez.

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What are Attacks on Education?

Attacks on education are any intentional or indiscriminate threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons—against students, educators, and education institutions. Such attacks include school arson or bombings, and targeted killings of education personnel, as well as abduction and forced recruitment of students and teachers, sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces or armed groups against students or teachers, and repression of education-related protests, at schools or en route to and from them. Military use of schools and universities often result in attacks on education, causing death and injury, and themselves obstruct teaching and learning, and lead to mass displacement and drop-out of students and educators.

GCPEA's research shows that **more than 11,000 attacks on education or incidents of military use of education facilities were reported between 2015 and 2019, harming over 22,000 students, teachers, and other education personnel.** These included more than 7,300 cases in which schools were bombed, set on fire, raided, or looted.

“On January 8, 2017, the militia came to my school. They did not want the schools to be open. They wanted to recruit students for their militia. Some of the students were forced to join them. Others went willingly. The first day they came, they took nine girls away and six boys. Of the nine girls, some were killed, others raped.... None of the [girls] came back to school.”

JUSTIN K., SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, LUIZA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, INTERVIEWED BY GCPEA, OCTOBER 27, 2018

What are the Consequences of Attacks on Education?

“We know what a crucial role schools and teachers play in providing children with some normalcy, with protection, with mental health safeguards, when they need it the most... Attacks on education have especially negative long-term impacts on girls and women...which dramatically affect the ability of female students to engage. Oftentimes, this low educational attainment makes going back to school almost impossible, and is, therefore, a mark for life.”

MS. NADA AL-NASHIF, UNITED NATIONS DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, JULY 9, 2020.

Attacks on education have dramatic and devastating short and long-term consequences for children’s and teachers’ lives, education systems, and wider society. They cause death and injury to students and educators, and damage and destruction to educational facilities. Attacks on education create a climate of fear, making parents less likely to send their children to school. School closures or dropout resulting from attacks may be permanent—especially for girls. An attack on an individual school, student, or teacher can have ripple effects, shutting other institutions in the vicinity or region. Attacks on education put significant pressure on education systems, resulting in knowledge loss, teacher shortages, and overcrowding. In the longer term, attacks on education may contribute to lower levels of education nationally and threaten achievement of development goals.

Progress in Protecting Education from Attack

A Global Commitment to Protect Education

Since 2010, a shift in global consciousness has taken place, with the international community recognizing the imperative to protect education from attack.

- GCPEA’s research on the extent and impact of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities—reported in *Education under Attack*, [2018](#), and [2020](#), and in *Lessons in War* [2012](#) and [2015](#) – has catalyzed global recognition of the need to respond to and prevent attacks on education and military use of educational facilities.
- The launch of the **Safe Schools Declaration** in May 2015 established a new international instrument for protecting education from attack. The Declaration resulted from a state-led process, strongly supported by GCPEA.
- Representing global recognition of the urgency to protect education during armed conflict, a significant majority of all UN member states have joined the Safe Schools Declaration.

What is the Safe Schools Declaration?

The **Safe Schools Declaration** is an inter-governmental political agreement, led by the governments of Argentina and Norway, through which states commit to protect students, educators, and educational facilities from attack. Since its creation in 2015, over 100 states have endorsed the Declaration, committing to protecting schools and universities from military use, strengthening data collection on attacks on education, providing assistance to survivors of attacks on education and pursuing accountability for perpetrators, and ensuring that education is safe and conflict-sensitive, and continues during armed conflict.

- Advocacy by GCPEA and its partners has resulted in stronger protections in Security Council Resolutions [1998](#) (2011), [2143](#) (2014), [2225](#) (2015), and [2427](#) (2018), which strongly condemn military use of schools and call for members states to deter the practice, as well as for enhanced monitoring and reporting.
- National leaders have gathered to recognize the importance of protecting education and their commitment to taking practical steps to do so. GCPEA, supporting champion states, co-hosted three high-level international conferences on safe schools in Oslo (2015), Buenos Aires (2017), and Palma de Mallorca (2019), as well as regional workshops in Panama City (2017) and Addis Ababa (2017). GCPEA also held national workshops in Somalia and Sudan (2018).
- GCPEA has emphasized the importance of safe education in achieving peace and security with the briefing papers, *Supporting Safe Education in the Sahel*, *Safeguard Yemen’s Future: Protect Education from Attack*, and *Attacks on Education in Afghanistan*, ahead of donor pledging conferences for these countries in 2020, 2019, and 2018 respectively.

Reductions in Military Use of Schools and Universities

New guidelines are reducing the military use of schools and universities.

- In 2014 and 2015, GCPEA led a consultative process with states, armed forces, UN agencies, and organizations working with non-state armed groups to develop the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. The *Guidelines* are incorporated as a commitment in the Safe Schools Declaration.
- The overall reported incidents of military use of schools and universities declined between 2015 and 2018 in the 12 countries that endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in 2015, and experienced at least one reported incident of military use of schools during the same period.
- Over a dozen countries have revised their national policies and practices, including their military manuals, to reduce military use of educational facilities. In Sudan, where a 2017 military command

order prohibited military use of schools, and Afghanistan, where the Ministry of Education issued a 2016 letter calling for security forces to evacuate schools, the UN subsequently documented reductions in military use of schools.

- GCPEA has participated in Geneva Call’s training with non-state armed groups to restrict military use of schools and implement the *Guidelines*. Geneva Call’s Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict, which includes a commitment to avoid using schools for military purposes, has been signed by over 25 non-state armed groups.

Improved data on Attacks on Education

Robust data on attacks on education is globally recognized as essential for preventing and responding effectively to attacks on education and to ensuring accountability.

“The Safe Schools Declaration was born out of partnership between the civil sector and a number of states led by Argentina and Norway. A core group of committed states has supported the Declaration since day one...[and] the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack continues to play a key part.”

MS. MARIANNE HAGEN, VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NORWAY, MAY 28, 2020.

- Reporting on attacks on education and military use of schools and universities has become more rigorous and systematic, including through GCPEA’s *Education under Attack* global reports released in [2014](#), [2018](#), and [2020](#).
- The UN has recognized that preventing attacks on education is essential for achieving development goals, including universal access to quality education. GCPEA’s *Education under Attack* series is the primary source for reporting on the UNESCO Institute of Statistics’ [thematic indicator 4.a.3](#) on attacks on students, personnel and institutions, within the framework to monitor progress towards [Sustainable Development Goal 4](#), Quality Education.

Greater Accountability for Attacks on Education

States and international bodies are increasingly holding those responsible for attacks on education accountable at the global, regional, and national levels.

- GCPEA’s partners regularly submit data from the *Education under Attack* series to UN treaty bodies, including the Committees on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Rights of the Child; and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. These treaty bodies have expressed concern and made recommendations about attacks on education in their investigations, including calling for endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration.
- The International Criminal Court has begun to regularly consider attacks against education when conducting investigations, issuing arrest warrants, and making trial judgements, including in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia, Mali, Sudan, and Uganda.

“To conduct an impartial investigation and punish perpetrators, it is critical to collect reliable information. In this regard, the report *Education under Attack* serves as an invaluable source of data and information on incidents of attack on education.”

AMBASSADOR CARLOS DANIEL AMORÍN TENCONI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF URUGUAY TO THE UNITED NATIONS, MAY 28, 2020

- Independent investigative mechanisms, including the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, have addressed attacks on education and military use of schools and universities.
- At the national level, perpetrators of attacks on education have been put on trial, including in Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Innovative Research and Guidance on the Impacts of Attacks on Education on Girls and Women

Growing evidence now shows the need for a gender-responsive approach to addressing attacks on education.

- Between 2016 and 2019, GCPEA conducted field research on attacks targeting female students and teachers in North-Eastern [Nigeria](#) and the [Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo](#), produced a global study of the impact of attacks on education on women and girls, and released [10](#) on how to implement each component of the Safe Schools Declaration to better protect girls and women.
- Influenced by GCPEA’s research, Nigeria included measures to respond to the particular needs of women and girls who have faced attacks on education in its draft national education in emergencies curriculum.
- Advocacy by GCPEA and its partners has resulted in increasing recognition of the intersections between protecting education from attack, sexual violence, and women’s participation in decision-making and political processes. States highlighted these intersections at the 2019 UN Security Council Open Debates on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and on Women, Peace, and Security, calling for endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration in order to better protect women and girls and fulfill their rights.
- GCPEA briefed the UN Security Council at its first ever Open Debate on attacks on education in September 2020, highlighting the impact on women and girls. The Presidential Statement noted the Safe Schools Declaration and emphasized the specific consequences of attacks on education for girls and women.

“Since 2015, we can proudly attest that the Safe Schools Declaration is working effectively, and it saves lives and preserves the right to education for all even in the hardest circumstances, including women and girls.”

MS. CRISTINA GALLACH, VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR IBERO-AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SPAIN, MAY 28, 2020.



A Ukrainian soldier walks through an abandoned school that was destroyed by repeated artillery barrages in the frontline village of Pisky, near Donetsk.

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“I would like to commend the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack for being an invaluable trove of resources in our collective and noble task of protecting education from attack.”

AMBASSADOR SAMSON SUNDAY ITEGBOJE,
CHARGE D’AFFAIRES, PERMANENT MISSION OF
NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, MAY 28, 2020.

Sharing Good Practice in Protecting Education

National leaders have had the opportunity to participate in international fora, exchange good practices and lessons learned for protecting education, and incorporate these lessons into their own context.

- GCPEA brought together over 100 education practitioners and child protection specialists, government officials, and human rights advocates from 19 conflict-affected countries at workshops in Phuket in 2011 and Istanbul in 2015. Participants exchanged good practice and lessons learned on protecting students, educators, and educational facilities from attack.
- Drawing on the knowledge shared at these conferences, GCPEA developed technical guidance on protecting education for school administrators and teachers, ministries of education, and local communities, and well as guidance on protecting teachers from attack.
- Examples of states and multi-lateral organizations implementing the Safe Schools Declaration have been growing, providing further good practice for others to draw on.



Children play outside their war-damaged school near Idlib, Syria.

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Achieving a Future Where All Students and Educators Can Learn and Teach Safely

“I welcome steps taken by member states to protect education institutions, and those who need them. This includes the Safe Schools Declaration, which aims to protect education from attack and to prevent schools and universities from being used for military purposes.”

MR. ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY GENERAL, SEPTEMBER 9, 2020.

The past decade has seen coalescence around a vision of the future in which students, educators, schools, and universities are kept safe from the devastation wrought by attacks on education. The success of the Safe Schools Declaration, the new UN International Day to Protect Education from Attack, and a strong call from the UN Security Council to safeguard education from attack, illustrate this consensus and present an opportunity for states, international organizations, and civil society to recommit to achieving this vision.

To make this future a reality, GCPEA is working to secure universal endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration by conducting advocacy and research and by engaging with partners to ensure that:

- 1 Military use of educational facilities is significantly restricted through stronger international standards and changes to international and national military doctrine and legislation;
- 2 Mechanisms are developed to deter governments and non-state armed groups from attacking students, educators, schools, or universities, including by holding perpetrators accountable; and
- 3 Programs and policies to prevent and respond to attacks on education—particularly ones that account for the different ways that attacks on education affect girls and women, and boys and men—are strengthened by rigorous research and data collection, supported, and funded.

“I love school a lot because through my studies, I’ll have a better future. I’ll be able to support my family and look after myself. I want to be a doctor.”

TSHIELA, AGED 10, A STUDENT FROM MULOMBELA VILLAGE, KASAI REGION, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, WHOSE SCHOOL WAS ATTACKED BY GOVERNMENT FORCES IN 2017.



Tshiela sits in what was once her school, before residents fled the fighting, in Mulombela village, Kasai region, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Thursday 25 January 2018.

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GCPEA's Steering Committee is comprised of Human Rights Watch, Institute of International Education, Education Above All Foundation through its program Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC), Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR.

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(Cover) On 3 December 2019, Nabya (right), 13, attends class in Kaya, Burkina Faso, the town in which her family found refuge after being displaced.

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