



COMMUN X
GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE
UNESCO EDUCATION IN WARZONES

Background Guide

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Letter from the Chairs

Dear COMMUN Delegates,

We are honored to welcome you to COMMUN XI's General Assembly on The Preservation of Education in Combat Zones, co-chaired by William Papp and Iris Eckleman. As your chairs, we will do our absolute best to ensure that you are able to get the most out of this conference as possible.

UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The agency currently has 194 active members, all working to help advance important issues such as science, communication, and education, the latter of which you will be doing in this committee. In UNESCO, every member state has equal voting power in decisions made by the organization. As a result, every delegate has equal decision making power to reflect real world circumstances.

To that end, **we are requiring that every delegate write a position paper for their role.** In doing this, you will not only be eligible for awards but will aid in helping this conference run as smoothly and effectively as possible.

The purpose of this conference is to discuss and create resolutions and policies to ensure the protection of education in combat-zones. Over the course of this conference, it will be expected for delegates to represent a wide range of diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas and viewpoints. By undertaking this endeavour, we hope that you will both gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by millions worldwide in the pursuit of education and the intricacies of how UN General Assemblies work in real world scenarios. Lastly, this conference should also be an opportunity for delegates to continue to hone important skills such as public speaking, analytical writing and research, and effective discourse.

As your chairs, we are eager to meet you and learn more about each of your positions. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either of us at the email addresses below.

Sincerely,

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Problem Statement:

When countries engage in warfare, their land and buildings are often ravaged with violence. Educational facilities are no exception. When these facilities are destroyed, shut down, or repurposed into shelters, the children relying on their services are left not only without a source of education, but without the safety from violence and abuse that these facilities provide. Children are acutely affected by any type of violence, as emotions that stem from conflict, such as fear, anxiety and depression will become dominant in their childhoods. When violence is directed towards schools, children's exposure to violence rises, and exacerbates this phenomenon.

Young women are predominantly affected by educational violence, which often forces them to remain at home. However, it can also force young men to drop out of school to support their families or to join the military as child-soldiers. Any lapses in education can impact a child's future education, health, income and psychological well-being, especially for children from low-income backgrounds. This fuels the cycle of poverty, which is exacerbated for each future generation. Even if families escape the conflict area, education for their children is far

from guaranteed; only 50% of refugee children have access to primary education, compared with a global level of over 90%.

Disregarding any immigration or economic background, any child who is away from school is less likely to come back, and their chance of return drops proportionally. Though humanitarian laws have been put in place prohibiting attacks on schools, they have largely been ineffectual, with numbers of attacks rising. In the last year alone, the UN reports that violence towards schools and colleges rose by 44%.

The goal of this committee is to develop effective strategies and policies to ensure the protection of education in conflict zones.

Background

A Brief History of Protecting Education

In 1935, various countries in the Americas came together and decided via the Roerich Pact that all educational facilities “shall be considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by belligerents.” In 1948, the movement spread around the world, in part due to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed that “everyone has a right to education.” Just a year later at the Fourth Geneva Convention, countries laid out basic ground rules to support this right, including that any occupying power should, “with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children.” Over the next couple years, amendments would be made to further outline the protections for schools, children, and education.

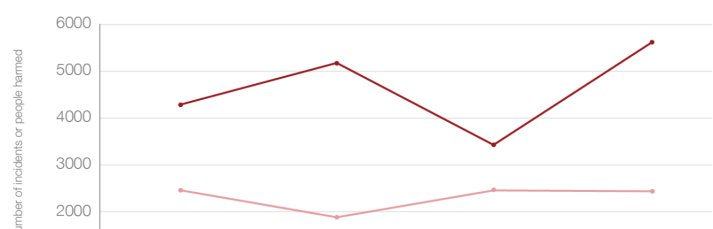
Unfortunately, despite these humanitarian laws, educational violence still occurs, and children in conflict-affected countries are 30% less likely to complete primary school than those

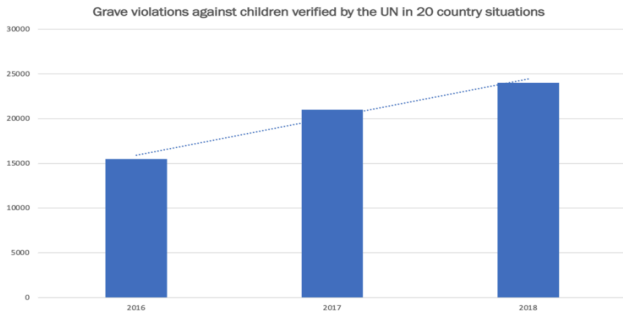
in non-conflict-affected countries. In the late 19th century, the world saw an uptick of educational violence, with conflicts such as the Balkan Wars, the Afghan-Soviet War and many others rendering thousands of children without access to schooling. In response, in 2009 the UN Committee on the Rights of a Child reiterated that countries should “fulfill their obligation therein to ensure schools as zones of peace and places where intellectual curiosity and respect for universal human rights is fostered; and to ensure that schools are protected from military attacks or seizure by militants; or used as centres for recruitment.”

In 2014, Norway consolidated global musings on this topic and published *Guidelines for Protecting Education from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. Argentina joined the project in 2015 and together their governments led other UN member states to pass the *Safe Schools Declaration*, an agreement to protect education during armed conflict. It opened for countries to endorse at the First Conference for Safe Schools in Oslo, Norway in May 2015 and since then, there have been a total of 4 conferences with 122 countries signed onto the declaration to date. In doing so, these countries have committed to collecting data on attacks on education, investigating violations of the act and persecuting perpetrators if need be, developing “conflict sensitive” approaches to education at a national level, supporting the continuation and re-establishment of educational facilities during armed conflict, and meeting on a regular basis to re-evaluate the declaration.

Most recently, in 2020 the UN established September ninth as the International “Day to Protect Education from Attack.” However, despite all of this legislation, 244 million children are currently missing out on their basic right to education.

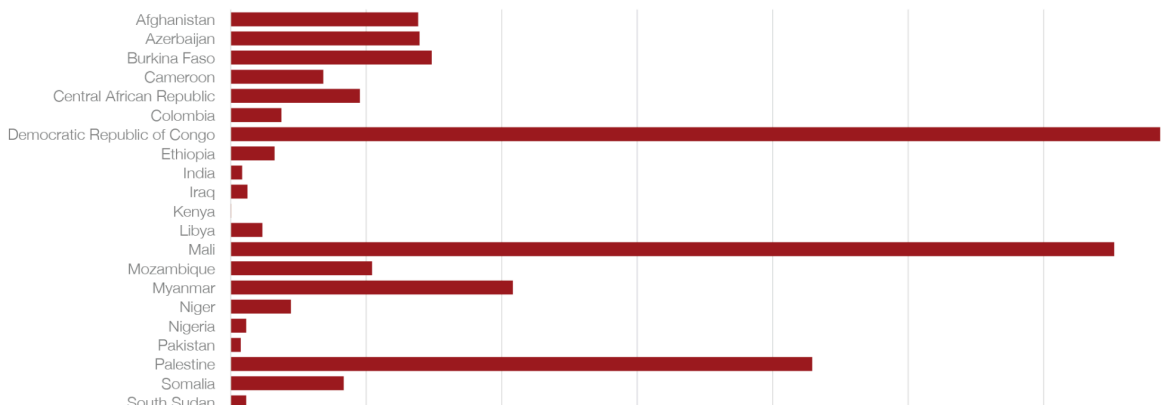
Incidents of attacks on education and military use and people harmed, 2018-2021





Just in the past five years, the world has seen some horrific examples of the effect violence has on education. UNICEF reports that in the last year of the Russia - Ukraine war, more than 340 educational facilities have been destroyed, bringing the total number of damaged schools to 2,800. This has directly affected at least 4.6 million children, who have struggled to continue their education, and at least 1 million have been forced to study online. Similarly, since civil conflict erupted in Sudan in 2022, 4.2 million children have been displaced from their schools, bringing the total to 9.6 million total in the country. In more recent years, in Palestine 550,000 children have had their access to education severed since October 2023, and the UN reports that Israel has destroyed 90% of schools and colleges in Gaza. Not only do attacks on schools hurt education, but they are a danger to the children themselves. This past year in Myanmar, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) reported that in an airstrike on a boarding school, at least 18 people were killed, most of them students.

Reported attacks on schools in profiled countries, 2020-2021



Examples of Work in this Area:

The most prominent work in this field has been done by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). Since their publishing of the *Safe Schools Declaration*, they have sent out a report titled “Education under Attack,” which profiles attacks on education and their frequency. They work with on-site agents to continue documentation and monitoring of violent attacks on educational facilities. To date, they've conducted over 100 interviews with women and girls who have been victims and eyewitnesses to attacks on education. From those they have released multiple reports on the impact of educational violence on women. However, there is currently no law that forces countries to sign onto the *Safe Schools Declaration*, and there is not a good system in place to investigate or prosecute countries that have broken agreements, even if they have signed on.

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has primarily worked on how to adapt education when a country is in conflict. They have created guidelines for Conflict Sensitive Education (CSE), which they define as “understanding the context in which the education policy/programme takes place, analyzing the two-way interaction between the context and the education policy/programme, and acting to minimize negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of education policies and programming on conflict, within an organization’s given priorities” as part of its strategic framework which sets goals to ensure safe education for those in emergencies. Though many countries have adopted this approach to some level, countries in intense conflict often struggle to allocate resources or time to its development.

Other organizations like Save The Children and Concern aid in this area: they create temporary educational facilities, donate school supplies, and train teachers to support children affected by crisis, conflict and displacement. Often this involves developing informal accelerated

learning programs, including those based on literacy, numeracy, and psychosocial support. Additionally, they work with governments to reestablish and rebuild national education systems once peace has been reached.

As women are predominantly affected by educational violence, organizations and funds such as the Malala Fund advocate for girl's education, and invest in organizations and schools that encourage and fight for the education of women.

Questions to Consider

While reading your country's positions below, performing your own research, and writing your position paper, consider these questions as guides to understand your country's stances and where you can collaborate with other delegates.

- Does your country think education should be protected for all individuals?
- How should countries balance the preservation of learning facilities with the need for shelter space and military bases during war?
- What steps has your country taken to endorse and implement the *Safe Schools Declaration*?
- How does your country monitor/report attacks on education facilities, and what systems are in place to support victims and prosecute perpetrators?
- How should countries address the inequalities in health, financial situation, and psychological well-being created by a lack of education?

- What are some strategies countries could use to adapt education during conflict, including training for teachers, the adoption of CSE, and perhaps the transition to digital education?
- Is your country open to working with others to ensure that the education of its citizens, and education in general, is protected?
- How does your country plan to address the potential compromise of education by its own military?

ROLES

Ukraine

Ukraine has worked to keep its schools functioning in the midst of its ongoing conflict, with the government collaborating with international partners to repair schools and documenting attacks to advocate for stronger educational protection. Through measures such as remote and hybrid schooling, the construction of bomb shelters in schools, and teacher training for crisis conditions, Ukraine has worked to ensure children's right to education in the midst of its ongoing conflict. These efforts have made Ukraine an international example of resilience in protecting education.

DRC

The Democratic Republic of the Congo plays an important role in protecting education during armed conflict by working with national authorities and international partners to reduce attacks on schools. Efforts include promoting international humanitarian norms, supporting temporary and alternative learning spaces, and helping reintegrate displaced children into education. The DRC has also engaged with global initiatives aimed at safeguarding schools and

preventing their military use, highlighting the importance of education as a stabilizing force in conflict-affected regions.

Myanmar

Myanmar's role in protecting education during armed conflict is shaped largely through the efforts of local communities and educators. Alternative and community-based learning have helped sustain access to education where schools are damaged, closed, or unsafe. Humanitarian organizations and local partners also work to protect learners and teachers, support displaced students, and advocate for respect for education under international humanitarian norms, keeping learning alive despite ongoing conflict, which has seen schools both used and targeted by military actors within the country. Often, local groups will take over the role of schooling children where the education system collapses.

Sudan

Sudan's role in protecting education during armed conflict is centered on efforts by educators, communities, and humanitarian partners to preserve learning amid widespread insecurity. Temporary learning spaces, emergency education programs, and psychosocial support help ensure that children affected by conflict can continue their education. International organizations also work to advocate for the protection of schools and teachers under international humanitarian norms, emphasizing education as a critical lifeline during a crisis. The civil war in Sudan has led to school closures and child recruitment into military service.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan's role in protecting education during armed conflict has involved efforts by teachers to sustain learning in the face of conflict. Community-based education, home-based classes, and emergency learning programs have been used to reach children in hard-to-access or conflict-affected areas. International partners continue to support measures that protect students and teachers and promote respect for education as a civilian activity, recognizing its importance for stability and recovery during and after conflict.

Syria

Syria's role in protecting education during its prolonged civil war has largely been carried out by local educators, communities, and humanitarian organizations working under difficult conditions. Efforts include establishing temporary learning spaces, rehabilitating damaged schools, and providing support to help children continue learning despite displacement and insecurity. National organizations also advocate for the protection of schools and education personnel under international humanitarian norms, emphasizing education as a vital source of stability and hope during prolonged conflict.

Russia

Russia has reportedly violated protection of education agreements in its war in Ukraine, and engages in military focused youth exercises as a part of its education program. Superficially, it emphasizes maintaining access to education in areas affected by conflict through alternative schooling arrangements and reconstruction of educational infrastructure where possible due to its obligation to do so under international humanitarian law.

United States

The United States is a major supporter and funder of global education initiatives. It domestically supports the Safe Schools Declaration but is not a signatory. Through agencies such as USAID and partnerships with international organizations, the U.S. funds emergency education programs, supports safe learning spaces, and helps rebuild schools damaged by conflict. The U.S. also advocates for respect for international humanitarian law that protects students, teachers, and educational facilities during armed conflict.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a major supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration and pushes diplomatically for international accountability for attacks on education. Through organizations like the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and partnerships with international NGOs, the UK helps establish safe learning spaces, rebuild schools, and provide resources for displaced or affected students. The UK also advocates internationally for the protection of schools, teachers, and students under international humanitarian law.

Germany

Germany funds international efforts to protect education and works to integrate refugee children into its education system. It also plays a role in protecting education during armed conflict by supporting humanitarian programs that ensure children can continue learning despite conflict. Through its foreign policy, Germany helps establish safe learning spaces, provide educational materials, and support displaced or conflict-affected students. Germany also

advocates for the protection of schools, teachers, and students under international humanitarian law.

France

France participates globally to protect education during conflict by providing funding to protection initiatives. It also supports the monitoring of attacks through UN bodies. France plays a role in protecting education during armed conflict by supporting humanitarian and development programs that help children continue learning in crisis-affected areas. Through funding, partnerships with international organizations, and emergency education initiatives, France helps create safe learning spaces, provide educational materials, and assist displaced or conflict-affected students.

Sweden

Sweden supports the Safe Schools Declaration and provides developmental assistance to emergency education organizations, providing educational materials and supporting students. Sweden also advocates globally for the protection of schools, teachers, and students under international humanitarian law, emphasizing education imperative to sustain during a conflict.

Egypt

Despite regional security challenges, Egypt works to maintain its education services and hosts displaced students from combat zones. It partners with international organizations to help give students access to schools, learning materials, and support. The country works to support regional efforts to promote peace and safe education for all students.

South Africa

South Africa supports the protection of education in conflict zones by contributing regionally to the sustainment of schools affected by violence in Africa. The country supports both regional and international programs which provide access to schooling for displaced and vulnerable students. South Africa was an early supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, agreeing to prevent military attacks on schools and working to ensure safe education during conflict.

Nigeria

Nigeria faces threats to its school system from extremist groups and uses systems like the Safe Schools Initiative to protect them. Although it is not a signatory on the Safe Schools Declaration, the country has worked on national initiatives to keep schools safe and provide alternate education options for displaced students. The country uses a combination of local partners and international organizations to keep its schools safe.

Ethiopia

Armed conflict in Ethiopia has disrupted its education system, and the government actively works with international humanitarian organizations to protect students. Humanitarian and community-led initiatives help provide educational materials and psychosocial support to students in insecure areas. Ethiopia is not a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, but national and international efforts continue to focus on keeping schools safe and ensuring children can access education during crises.

Japan

Japan funds international education protection programs by integrating education protection into its foreign policy. Japan plays a role in protecting education during armed conflict primarily through international assistance and humanitarian aid, funding programs that protect children affected by conflict. Japan also supports initiatives that strengthen the resilience of education systems in crisis-affected countries. Japan is not a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, but it actively promotes the protection of education and the safety of students and teachers through global development and humanitarian programs.

China

China has stated its support for the UN's protection of children, and has condemned the treatment of education in Gaza as well as implementing domestic laws. China also provides humanitarian aid and developmental assistance to countries, helping them improve the quality and protection of their education systems. These partnerships often focus on helping vulnerable populations in crisis-affected regions continue their education. China does not endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

South Korea

Although they do not endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, South Korea has contributed humanitarian aid to UNICEF, and has domestic laws to protect students. It contributes aid internationally to provide learning opportunities and educational resources to students affected

by conflict. Additionally, it engages in global efforts to promote the protection of students and teachers during conflict.

Israel

In recent conflict, Israel has continually attacked education facilities in Gaza, even targeting schools that had been converted to shelters. It engages in efforts focused on maintaining the safety and continuity of learning for students within its own borders, particularly in areas affected by armed attacks or threats. Measures include reinforced school buildings, early warning systems, and emergency protocols to protect students and staff during conflict.

Palestine

Despite over 90% of their schools having been destroyed, Palestine has created temporary learning spaces and adopted safety protocols during the recent conflict. Humanitarian organizations and local authorities help establish safe learning spaces, repair damaged schools, and support students' continuity of education despite insecurity. Palestine is a supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, advocating for the protection of schools, students, and teachers under international humanitarian law.

Argentina

Argentina is a co-leader in the creation of the Safe Schools Declaration, and has passed numerous laws and policies to ensure the protection of education. Argentina's role in protecting education during armed conflict is primarily expressed through its support for international humanitarian efforts and development programs that help children in crisis-affected regions

access safe learning. Through partnerships with international organizations, Argentina contributes to initiatives that provide support for students affected by conflict.

Norway

Norway was the spearhead in the Safe Schools Declaration, has also created the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) fund, and contributes to the World Food Programme (WFP). It funds humanitarian programs and partners with international organizations to ensure that students receive safe access to education during ongoing conflict.

Mexico

Mexico plays an important role in protecting education by supporting international norms and global initiatives which protect students and teachers during conflicts. It has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and remains committed to preventing military use of educational facilities and protecting learning environments. Mexico advocates for education protection through its foreign policy and collaboration with international bodies, emphasizing secure and effective schools for all.

Canada

Canada plays a prominent international role in protecting education during armed conflict, emphasizing that access to safe learning environments is a fundamental human right. As an early endorser and strong supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, Canada advocates for limiting the military use of schools. Through its foreign policy, Canada promotes policies that

safeguard education systems in crisis settings and help ensure that conflict does not deprive children and youth of their right to learn.

Cambodia

Canada has taken a mixed approach to supporting education in combat zones. While the country has contributed UN troops in other conflicts, it has not formally endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and relies on NGOs to help support its own education system in the midst of ongoing border conflicts.

Yemen

Yemen's efforts to support education during its prolonged armed conflict have focused on keeping basic learning opportunities available despite instability. Government agencies, local communities, and humanitarian organizations have worked to reopen damaged schools, provide temporary learning spaces, supply teaching materials, and offer psychosocial support to students affected by violence. Although resources are limited, these initiatives aim to preserve children's access to education and mitigate the long-term impact of conflict on learning and development.

Mali

Mali's efforts to support education during armed conflict center on maintaining access to schooling for children. Working with international partners, the government has supported the creation of temporary learning spaces, teacher training for crisis settings, and programs that help reintegrate displaced students into classrooms. Community groups and NGOs also play a major role by providing learning materials, psychosocial support, and safe-school initiatives. These

measures aim to protect children's right to education and reduce the long-term impact of conflict on their learning and wellbeing.

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