



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use

Global Coalition to  
**Protect Education from Attack**





Boys hold books while standing in the ruins of their bombed school in the Hamdan area, west of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on March 23, 2014.

© 2014 Reuters/Mohamed al-Sayaghi

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Schools and universities should be safe places of learning. However, children’s and young people’s rights to education and protection are violated in most countries experiencing conflict or insecurity. Students and education personnel have been threatened, killed, injured, tortured, recruited, and used by armed forces and armed groups, while in school or en route to and from school. Armed parties have also used 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. The short-term impacts of attacks on education include death, injury, and destruction of educational infrastructure. The long-term impacts include disruptions in attendance, declines in student enrolment, diminished quality of education and learning, and reductions in teacher recruitment—all of which can prevent countries from fulfilling the right to education and other rights, as well as achieving education and development goals.*

This paper is primarily intended for Ministries of Education, UN agencies, and international and local non-governmental organizations (I/NGOs) to support school-based actors, namely principals, teachers, school management committees, and community members to develop and strengthen approaches to planning and protecting education from attack and schools from military use at the school-level.

The aim of this paper is to describe what is actually being done in the field at the school-level to protect education from attack, identifying the risks and challenges involved, and drawing out lessons learned and recommendations from these measures as well as other literature on the topic. The measures have not been formally evaluated, so much of our understanding of what is successful and what is not is based on the anecdotal assessment of practitioners and is context-specific.

Seven school-based measures are described and each measure includes country examples and case studies, considerations regarding risks and challenges, as well as other lessons learned. Education actors considering implementing the school-based protection measures described in this paper should review all of the measures to assess the applicability to their own context, the risks involved, and the potential benefits. Since risks and conflict contexts vary from country to country, there is no one approach that can be applied to all situations. Measures must be adapted to meet the context-specific needs of each country or locale, and a conflict-sensitive approach<sup>1</sup> to development and implementation adopted to ensure that measures “do no harm.”

## SCHOOL-BASED MEASURES IMPLEMENTED TO PROTECT EDUCATION FROM ATTACK

### 1. Unarmed Physical Protection Measures

Unarmed physical protection measures have not relied on the use of weapons or force and have been implemented to shield potential education targets from attack, to minimize damage caused by attacks, and to provide schools with a means of self-defense. Measures have included: unarmed guards, protection committees, physical infrastructure (e.g. school bunkers or boundary walls constructed around schools), protective presence and accompaniment, teacher/student housing, community education and mobilization, as well as measures to protect against gender-based violence (e.g. codes of conduct for education personnel).

### 2. Armed Physical Protection Measures

In countries experiencing ongoing attacks by parties to armed conflict, some schools have used armed guards and patrols to protect teachers, students, and school infrastructure and to provide schools with a means of self-defense. While some schools have implemented armed protection measures on their own initiative, in most cases schools have coordinated with Ministries, local police and security forces, or other government entities. Measures have included: armed guards, armed escorts, and arming teachers.

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

In several countries school and community leaders have negotiated agreements with parties to armed conflict—including government forces and non-state armed groups—not to attack schools or use them for military or political purposes. Negotiations have usually required some type of intervention by a third party that is trusted or acceptable to all stakeholders and have involved either direct dialogue or, if the parties have been unwilling or unable to engage in face-to-face meetings, have utilized some form of shuttle diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> There have been risks involved for all parties in negotiation.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. Early Warning/Alert Systems

Schools in several countries have independently or in coordination with Ministries, UN agencies, or I/NGOs implemented early warning/alert systems to communicate in real time about threats or attacks on schools. When education personnel and parents have been given early warning of potential attacks, they have temporarily closed schools, transferred students to schools in safe areas, or provided alternative delivery of education. Some systems have used mobile phones for communications between school administration, school safety committees, families, local Ministries, and security forces. Through short message service (SMS) text messages, safety warnings have been issued and emergency assistance and other response mechanisms have been activated.

### 5. Alternative Delivery of Education

To avoid attacks or the threat of violence, schools have implemented a number of measures to provide alternative delivery of education. These measures have been initiated at the school-level, usually in collaboration with community members, NGOs, and sometimes INGOs and Ministries, depending on the conflict context and motivation for attacks. Modifications in time, place, and mode of education delivery have also been devised when normal school sites have been damaged, occupied, or targeted. Alternative delivery of education can better ensure continuity in access to learning opportunities, and can provide structure, routine, and support to students and teachers, which can also bring psychosocial benefits. Measures have included: community-based schools, schedule changes, distance learning, and relocating places of delivery of education.

### 6. Psychosocial Support

UNICEF defines psychosocial support as “those program components, which assist children, families, and communities to cope with crisis and to reinforce or regain healthy psychosocial development and resilience in the face of challenging circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> Components of psychosocial support at the school-level have included: temporary educational activities; child-friendly learning environments; referral systems; teacher and caregiver training (in approaches to psychosocial support); services for victims of gender-based violence; codes of conduct; and other measures to assist teachers (e.g. ensuring teachers are regularly compensated).

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

Schools in a number of countries have chosen to implement comprehensive school-based safety and security plans, often with the support of Ministries, UN agencies, or I/NGOs. These plans require strong leadership from principals and school management or protection committees, with active community and parent participation. The plans have incorporated an array of measures, including protection, mitigation, and response actions. Many of the six other measures described in this briefing paper can be incorporated into a strategic, comprehensive approach to safety and security planning.<sup>5</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in the report are drawn primarily from reports written by INGOs and UN agencies that have supported school-based measures and represent a synthesis of lessons learned from practices in a number of countries. **The overarching recommendation of the paper is for school-based actors to develop and implement school-based safety and security plans, rather than ad hoc measures, and for Ministries, UN, and other international agencies and donors to support these efforts.** By adopting a coordinated, cohesive strategy, school-based actors could be better prepared, ideally, to prevent and respond to attacks on students, teachers, and school buildings.

### Recommendations to School Administrators, Principals, and Head Teachers:

**Comprehensive School-based Safety and Security Planning:** Develop a comprehensive safety and security plan, tailored to local needs, in collaboration with the school management committee and local education authorities.

**Leadership Role:** Assume a leadership role in developing and implementing school-based measures, in collaboration with community members, education authorities, and others.

**Risk Analysis:** Identify possible threats to students, teachers, schools, and community members and the probability of attack.

**Community Involvement and School Management Committees:** Form a school protection committee and ensure community participation to ensure support for school-based protection measures.

**Resources:** Seek resources from local education authorities, I/NGOs, UN agencies, and other sources to strengthen protection measures.

**Advocacy:** Advocate for national and local policies that protect education from attack.

### Recommendations to Ministry of Education and Other Ministries:

**Policy Development:** Develop a comprehensive policy for protecting education from attack and military use, and engage all concerned ministry staff at central and local level in implementing this strategy. Include short term measures for prevention and response, as well as adopting conflict-sensitive education policies and programs that help reduce the risk of future conflict.

**Financial and Technical Support:** Support schools in developing safety and security plans, and provide financial support, preferably with a multi-year commitment.

**Advocacy:** Advocate for funding of safety and security plans, including rehabilitation of schools damaged by attacks or military use, with concerned ministries and with donors

### Recommendations to UN Agencies and I/NGOs:

**Technical Support:** Support the development of school-based safety and security plans, and ensure sustained support for school-based protection measures.

**Support Innovative and Evidence-based Measures:** Support innovative measures including technology that can facilitate early warning or distance learning.

**Advocacy:** Advocate with government to budget for and implement safe schools measures, including conflict-sensitive planning and curriculum to reduce the risk of future conflict, promote social cohesion, and strengthen community and individual resilience.

One way in which governments can work to protect schooling is by endorsing and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration<sup>6</sup>, which includes commitments to address systemic education issues, including by introducing conflict-sensitive education policies, taking action to support the continuation of education during armed conflict, and re-establishing educational facilities following attack or military use. The Declaration also includes commitments to strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks and military use of schools, prosecute perpetrators, and support victims. Finally, by joining the Declaration, states are endorsing the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Attack and Military Use during Armed Conflict*,<sup>7</sup> which will better ensure the safety of students and teachers and safeguard the right to education in conflict.

<sup>1</sup> Developed by education policymakers and planners at the ministry level, conflict-sensitive and risk-informed policies and programs are intended to address underlying grievances that drive conflict. For more information on conflict-sensitive education policies and programming, see: INEE, Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitive Education (INEE, 2013), <http://www.ineesite.org/en/resources/inee-guidance-note-on-conflict-sensitive-education>; and UNESCO Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO International Bureau of Education, and Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, Safety, Resilience and Social Cohesion: a guide for education sector planners and curriculum developers (IIEP, 2015).

Shuttle diplomacy is the action of an outside party serving as an intermediary between or among parties; the parties do not directly engage with one another.

Melinda Smith, "Schools as Zones of Peace: Nepal case study in access to education during armed conflict and civil unrest," in Brendan O'Malley, Protecting Education from Attack: A State of the Art Review, (UNESCO, 2010), pp. 261-278, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001867/186732e.pdf>.

UNICEF, "UNICEF Programming for Psychosocial Support, Frequently Asked Questions" undated, <http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Programming%20for%20Psychosocial%20Support%20FAQs.pdf>.

These plans may also take note of other safety hazards; for examples of school-level tools for vulnerability analysis and plan development see Anna Seeger and Luke Pye (forthcoming). Lessons from strengthening education sector capacities in Conflict and Disaster Risk Management. (Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning).

<sup>6</sup> The Safe Schools Declaration, [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/safe\\_schools\\_declaration-final.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/safe_schools_declaration-final.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, [http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf).

To read the full report please see  
[www.protectingeducation.org/what\\_schools\\_can\\_do](http://www.protectingeducation.org/what_schools_can_do)

## 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.

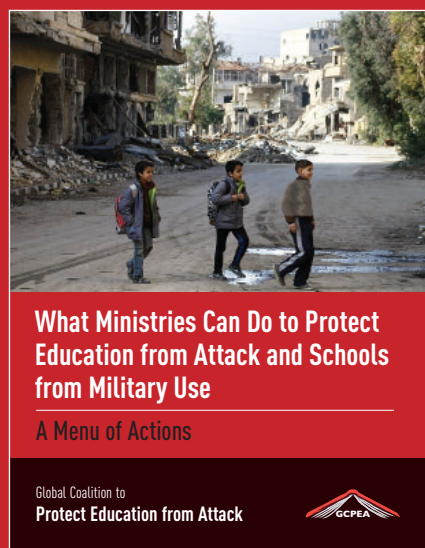
This paper is the result of independent external research commissioned by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations

## Acknowledgements

GCPEA gratefully acknowledges the generous support of PEIC, UNICEF, and an anonymous donor.

This paper was prepared by Melinda Smith, GCPEA consultant.

For more information on protecting education from attack during armed conflict, please also refer to this report's companion publication, *What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Schools from Military Use: A Menu of Actions*.



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

## 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)

Front cover: A schoolgirl walks past damaged buildings in Maaret al-Numan town in Idlib province, Syria on October 28, 2015.

© 2015 Reuters/Khalil Ashawi