



International Day to Protect Education from Attack

Joint Statement by African Union Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS); Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development and Save the Children International

In commemoration of the International Day to Protect Education from Attack, the AUC Department of Political Affairs Peace and Security, the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development and Save the Children International join Africans and the international community in reflecting on this special day.

Today marks the second International Day to Protect Education from Attack to safeguard education in armed conflict. On 29 May 2019, the United Nations General Assembly designated 9 September as the International Day to Protect Education from Attack. This coincided with the fifth anniversary of the [Safe Schools Declaration](#), an inter-governmental commitment led by Norway and Argentina. Over the past six years, this declaration has successfully elevated the recognition of the devastating impact of attacks on education and the military use of educational facilities, and served as an effective tool for protecting students and educators from the harm that results from attacks. States that endorse the Declaration also commit to implementing the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#), a practical tool that provides guidance to parties of armed conflict and concrete steps to ensure the protection of education.

Attacks against education represents one of the six grave violations committed against children. Despite progress achieved in protecting education from attack, the extent and scope of attacks remains disturbing. The [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack \(GCPEA\)](#), an inter-agency coalition that addresses the problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict, has documented a systematic pattern of attacks on education in more than 37 countries, and military use of schools and universities in 34 countries, between 2015 and 2019.

Research has shown that female students and teachers were directly targeted for attack because of their gender, including through the bombing of girls' schools, abductions, rape, and harassment, in at least 21 countries. More shocking still, armed forces and groups were reportedly responsible for sexual violence in, or on the way to or from, schools and universities in at least 17 countries. This is not tolerable at all and must be stopped through the collaboration of all stakeholders.

Attacks on education have persisted under the pandemic and demonstrated again the vulnerabilities of vacant schools being used for military purposes. But recent good practice has also demonstrated the value of the Safe Schools Declaration in protecting schools from attack and military use.

The Declaration commitments have been translated into binding African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) decisions on attacks on schools. The principles of the Declaration are further included in the AU Doctrine on Peace Support Operations, adopted in January 2021, which directly refers to the central commitment of the SSD, namely, to “ensure that schools are not attacked and used for military purposes”. This is an important milestone which reflects the increasing commitment within the African continent on safeguarding education.

Education is the future of Africa. Consequently, it is incumbent upon states, inter-governmental and international organizations to invest more in the cause of protecting education. Protecting education needs silencing the guns in Africa which in turn contributes toward Aspiration 4 of the AU Agenda 2063, ensuring a peaceful and secure continent, a conflict-free continent with harmony and understanding among communities at the grassroots level.

Among other things, realizing peaceful Africa requires combating illegal possession of firearms by civilians. To encourage all civilians who own illegal arms to hand them to their designated national authorities without fear of disclosure of their identity, arrest, or prosecution, the African Union has set the Africa Amnesty Month, every September. Thus, controlling illicit firearms contributes to protecting education from attacks and hence fellow Africans are encouraged to respond to call.

While we commend measures taken by many countries in revising their policies to restrict the use of schools and universities for military purposes, we also call upon states to redouble their efforts to protect schools, teachers, and students from attack and the military use of schools.

As part of the advocacy efforts to reach this objective, the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration will be hosted by the Government of Nigeria, together with the Governments of Argentina, Norway, Spain, AU Commission and GCPEA under the theme “Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice” from October 25th- 27th 2021. The Conference is a forum for states, and multilateral and civil society organizations to share progress and good practice as well as challenges in implementing commitments within the Safe Schools Declaration, to inspire others to adopt similar measures and galvanize action for safe education for all. We encourage Member States to attend the Conference, to announce their endorsement and share examples of implementation on the Safe Schools Declaration in advance of, or directly at the Conference.