

Remarks at Launch of the 2022 Education Under Attack Report

By William S. Chemaly, Global Protection Cluster Coordinator | 16 June 2022 | Geneva

We have 32 clusters across the world. 90% are operating in active conflict settings witnessing protection needs and risks of 160M people.

Like in South Sudan, where I was yesterday -- in most of these contexts -- lack of food, climate shock, health crisis and socio-economic meltdowns are increasing the protection risks.

However, without a doubt the main driver of protection risks is conflict and human rights violations.

Deliberate attacks on civilians and rights violations are being orchestrated with marked impunity. Two third of operations report the situation as severe or extreme.

We are seeing homes, markets, camps, water systems, schools, hospitals and people routinely targeted, bombed, looted, drizzled with explosives devastated by landmines.

We are particularly worried about behaviors during wars and the lack of respect for IHL norms and principles – including what should be the cornerstone of humanitarian action: protection of civilians.

We come to today's discussion with this background to report four facts that we see on the ground.

Fact one, education protected is lives protected. It is civilians alive, with dignity and purpose. It is a safe space to deal with trauma and provide support.

Fact two, education protected is children protected. It is less girl forced to marriage. less child labor. less children caught in trafficking rings. less children recruited by armed groups.

Fact three, education protected is development for communities. It is a sense of normality. It is a signal that basic infrastructure that takes care of people and futures is still up and running. It is children learning that they have responsibilities and rights.

Fact four, education protected means that peace stands a chance. It is a generation learning to solve problems. Children learning that no matter the present, hard work holds a promise of a better future.

Protection mandate is lifesaving, foundational element of humanitarian response.

Given how attacks on education kill people and splinter into several other critical protection risks, we see that education saves lives, directly, concretely, instantly and builds peace and development that in turn reduce violence and saves lives.

The Safe Schools Declaration saves lives.

To conclude, here are two very concrete ways we can strengthen the protection of students, educators, and education facilities as part of the broader protection agenda:

1- We can reinforce protection and protection of education facilities, children and teachers by increasing humanitarian access that protects.

This requires widening the way we see and negotiate for humanitarian access. Humanitarian access is not only material aid distribution. It is also services that stay and deliver, like education.

Across our operations, protection actors can reach at best 25-50% of those in need of protection. This percentage gets much lower in tough operations or tough parts of operations.

What this does is damage the ability of protection actors to work. To follow individual cases, to work with communities to reduce risks, to talk to men with guns to change behaviours, to build safe spaces, to address trauma, to monitor protection risks, to analyse the situation – tell the story – and influence sectoral responses.

2- We can reinforce protection and protection of education facilities, children and teachers by investing in protection advocacy that changes behaviours.

This means ensuring protection actors stand by communities, tell their story and advocate on their behalf before, when and after attacks on education occur. But also, that sustained presence is granted to run child protection services and programmes in preventive and responsive ways.

Collective protection monitoring and analysis in instances of direct and indirect attacks on education leading to stronger accountability.

Strongly influencing the prioritisation of protection of educational facilities and individuals so as to ensure sustained diplomatic and advocacy efforts with duty bearers, authorities, armed actors.

Dialogue, negotiations and engagement with armed actors to ensure safe access of students to education.

Sensitisation of armed actors in relation to IHL and Protection of Civilians principles – ultimately generating behaviour changes and ensuring compliance with international law.

Prevention actions through community engagement and sensitisation of families in relation to early marriage, children dropping out of school, mine risk education, trafficking, child recruitment, child labour.

Finally, our message to you is that education under attack initiative, saves lives, it upholds dignity, gives us a humanitarian space in which to operate and when it works gives hope in times of crisis.

Background and Concept

Education under Attack is the flagship publication of the [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#) (GCPEA). It surveys attacks on education globally and tracks six forms of violence in the education context.¹ The 2022 edition documents attacks on schools, universities, their students and staff, and military use of schools and universities from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021, and highlights the impact of these attacks, as well as positive developments in protecting education in armed conflict during this period.

The 2022 edition is the sixth in a series of publications examining the threat of, or actual use of, force against students, teachers, academics, other education personnel, or educational facilities and materials, as well as the military use of schools and universities. This edition builds on two studies published by UNESCO in 2007 and 2010, and three studies published by GCPEA in [2014](#), [2018](#), and [2020](#). The report profiles 28 conflict-affected countries with a systematic pattern of attacks on education and military use of educational facilities. In addition to the countries profiled in the report, GCPEA identified sporadic reports of attacks on education in over 45 other countries. The report examines trends in attacks on education related to Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021, as well as the gendered impacts of attacks on education. It also analyses the effects of explosive weapons use on schools and universities, which occurred in at least 25 countries in 2020 and the first half of 2021.

The event will underscore the extent and impact of targeted and indiscriminate violence against students, educators, and their schools and universities in conflict settings, present the report's key findings and identify how the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) is contributing to preventing this violence and mitigating its effects. To date, [114 states](#) have joined the Declaration - an intergovernmental political commitment to protect education during armed conflict. The Declaration is an important tool that saves the lives of civilians, preserves the civilian character of educational facilities, and protects education from attack more generally.

Objectives:

- ❖ Highlight the widespread scope and increasing incidence of attacks on education globally and disseminate the report's findings and recommendations.
- ❖ Underscore the human impact of attacks on education, including ways in which girls and women may be differently impacted than boys and men.
- ❖ Encourage policy makers and practitioners to prioritize protecting education in their advocacy, planning, and programming, including by using the Safe Schools Declaration as a framework for action.
- ❖ Encourage further endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and action to protect education.
- ❖ Seize upon the Geneva community's specific added-value and unique role in protecting education in conflict to encourage collective action to implement the Safe Schools Declaration's commitments.

¹ Attacks on schools; attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel; military use of schools and universities; child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school; sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups at, or on the way to or from, school or university; and attacks on higher education.