

Children's right to education should be protected at all times, especially during armed conflict

Press Release

The right to safety and education should be guaranteed to all children during the armed conflict, therefore, the Ministry of Education and Science supports the initiative of joining the Safe School Declaration. This statement was made by Liliya Hrynevych, Minister of Education and Science, during round table *“The Safe Schools Declaration: how to protect the right to education during armed conflict”* on Thursday.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, over 740 schools have been damaged in Ukraine with 648,000 students and teachers being affected by the conflict. Boys, girls, teachers, and educational staff in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are directly suffering from the consequences of the armed conflict, which include significant protection and psychosocial risks and needs, and a disrupted learning process. Their chances to live a normal life and develop to their full potential get bleaker with every new attack on their education.

On the 28th of September 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science, together with Save the Children, UNICEF, and the Education Cluster, hosted in Kyiv a round table discussion on *“The Safe Schools Declaration: how to protect the right to education during armed conflict”*. This was attended by the Minister of Education and Science, representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Defense, and Foreign Affairs, Oblast administrations, representatives of the Ombudsman, the government of Norway, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, and a number of other international NGOs.

“The Ministry of Education and Science supports all fundamental values of the Declaration. Our task during the armed conflict is to rehabilitate the educational infrastructure, provide psychological support to students, parents and teachers, as well as promote safety and health care trainings”, mentioned **Liliya Hrynevych, Minister of Education and Science.**

Countries that join the Safe Schools Declaration make a political commitment to better protect students, teachers, schools, and universities during armed conflict. The Declaration was drafted through a consultative process led by Norway and Argentina and was opened for state endorsement at an international conference held in Oslo, Norway, in May 2015.

“We can prevent future conflicts if we educate our children in a friendly and safe environment which promotes the principles of peace. School is where their future begins. Joining the Declaration sends an important message that schools are civilian objects and should not be attacked or used for military purposes. We are sure that this approach can save children's lives during conflict”, emphasized **Michele Cecere, Save the Children in Ukraine Country Representative.**

Governments that endorse the Declaration pledge to take concrete steps to ensure that education can continue even in times of conflict, including by committing to exercise restraint with respect to the use of schools and universities for military purposes, thus helping to better safeguard the civilian character of such facilities.

«Approximately 200,000 conflict-affected children, youth, and educators from Eastern Ukraine need safe and protective schools to learn and recover. Joining the Declaration would demonstrate to the whole world Ukraine's deep commitment to the provision of safe and high quality education to all Ukrainians especially in the light of reforms», highlighted **Giovanna Barberis, UNICEF Representative in Ukraine.**

During the round table, participants discussed the Safe Schools Declaration and the accompanying *Guidelines*, which are seen as crucial international instruments to protect children's right to receive education in safe schools during times of armed conflict. Participants also shared examples of good practice from around the world and explored the legal aspects of endorsing and implementing the Declaration in the context of Ukraine.

“In order to foster safer school environments for children affected by conflict, the Ukraine Education Cluster is actively monitoring and responding to conflict-related attacks on schools in close cooperation with education authorities. Joining the Declaration will strengthen this work and keep more kids safe at school”, stressed **Maryanna Schmuki, Ukraine Education Cluster Coordinator**.

The [Safe Schools Declaration](#) was presented in 2015 at the First International Safe Schools Conference in Norway. The Declaration provides countries the opportunity to express political support for the protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflict; and the implementation of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. So far 69 countries have endorsed the Declaration.

The Declaration contains a number of commitments aimed at strengthening the prevention of, and response to, attacks on education during armed conflict. These include: improving reporting of attacks on schools; collecting reliable data on attacks and military use of schools and universities; providing assistance to victims of attacks; investigating allegations of violations of national and international law and prosecuting perpetrators where appropriate; developing and promoting “conflict-sensitive” approaches to education; seeking to continue education during armed conflict; and supporting the work of the United Nations on the children and armed conflict agenda.

The Education Cluster is an open formal forum for coordination and collaboration on education in humanitarian crises. The Education Cluster brings together NGOs, UN agencies, academics, and other partners under the shared goal of ensuring predictable, well coordinated and equitable provision of education for populations affected by humanitarian crises.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) was established 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 an international coalition of organizations that includes: CARA (Council for At-Risk Academics), Human Rights Watch, Institute of International Education/IIE Scholar Rescue Fund, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, Save the Children, Scholars at Risk Network, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR.