



## Global Coalition to **Protect** **Education from Attack**

### Global Progress Protecting Schools, Universities from Military Use

#### *Safe Schools Declaration Conference to Highlight Successes*

(Abuja, October 22, 2021) – The military use of schools and universities in countries that were early endorsers of the international Safe Schools Declaration declined between 2015 and 2020, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) said today. New laws and military policies from governments and armed forces contributed to the reduction, the group found in a new report, “[Protecting Schools from Military Use: Law, Policy, and Military Doctrine 2021](#)”.

Good practice in protecting education from attack and schools and universities from military use will be the focus of the [Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration](#), to be held virtually and in-person in Abuja, Nigeria, from October 25 to 27, 2021. The Conference, hosted by Nigeria with Argentina, Norway, Spain, the African Union Commission, and GCPEA, will bring together high-level representatives from governments, international organizations, and civil society to promote global cooperation and strengthen coordination on implementing the [Safe Schools Declaration](#). It will build on earlier Safe Schools Declaration conferences held in Oslo, Norway, in 2015, Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2017, and Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in 2019.

“With the surge of attacks on education in the last year and classrooms around the world reopening their doors after pandemic-related closures, action to ensure the safety of students and educators is more critical than ever,” said [Diya Nijhowne](#), executive director at GCPEA. “All states should endorse the Safe Schools Declaration ahead of the Abuja Conference and embrace its theme of Ensuring Education for All: From Commitment to Practice.”



The Global Coalition found that military use of schools and universities among the 13 countries that endorsed the Declaration in 2015 and 2016 and that experienced military use dropped from 180 incidents in 2015 to 70 in 2020. This decline occurred although attacks on education and the military use of schools and universities increased globally by a third in 2020 compared with 2019, while the Covid-19 pandemic [forced the prolonged closure of education facilities](#) around the world.

Military use can make the school or university a target for attack and put students’ and educators’

the facilities and can prevent students from attending classes.

The [Safe Schools Declaration](#) is an intergovernmental political commitment to protect students, educators, schools, and universities in armed conflict. The Declaration, developed through a state-led process headed by Norway and Argentina, and introduced in May 2015, has now been endorsed by [112 states](#).

By endorsing the Declaration, governments commit to ensuring the continuation of education during armed conflict, prosecuting those responsible for attacks, aiding victims and survivors, and strengthening monitoring and reporting of attacks. Governments also commit to using the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#). The *Guidelines* provide concrete guidance to armed forces and non-state armed groups on how to restrict schools from being used as barracks and bases, fighting positions, and weapons stores, among other military uses. GCPEA identified military use of schools or universities in over 20 countries in 2020.

As the first international Safe Schools Declaration Conference to be hosted in Africa and in a country affected by armed conflict, the Abuja Conference will prominently feature Nigeria and the [Sahel](#) region's challenges and progress in addressing attacks on education. Since December 2020, over [1,000 students have been abducted in Nigeria](#).

Joining the Declaration involves becoming part of a global community of practice committed to a common goal. At the Abuja Conference, Spain will discuss [training it led on the Declaration](#) earlier this year, and Norway will introduce [a state-led implementation network](#) through which governments can share good practices, discuss challenges, and take joint action to keep education safe.

The Abuja Conference will focus on identifying specific ways governments have implemented the Declaration and *Guidelines*, and how these can be adapted and used in different contexts. The Conference will also examine how to enhance monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, including by using methodologies offered in GCPEA's *Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education*, recently featured in a [new interactive website](#). [Registration](#) for virtual participation at the conference is open to all.





In an elementary school in Ethiopia's Tigray region, children found uniforms abandoned by Tigrayan forces in a classroom on December 9, 2020. Members of the Tigray Special Forces took over the village elementary school while it was empty due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Photo by EDUARDO SOTERAS/AFP via Getty Images

“Tragically, attacks on education and military use of schools and universities continue, but the Safe Schools Declaration has proved to be an effective tool against this violence, with successful strategies for protecting educators and students expanding and being more widely shared and emulated,” Nijhowne said. “Attacks and military use of schools can be prevented: participate in the Abuja Conference to learn how, and join a growing global community committed to safe learning for all.”



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The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), was formed in 2010 by organizations working in the fields of education in emergencies and conflict affected contexts, higher education, protection, and international human right and humanitarian law that were concerned about ongoing attack on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity. GCPEA is a coalition that includes United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. GPCEA is a project of the Tides Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

Learn more at [www.protectingeducation.org](http://www.protectingeducation.org).

GCPEA is grateful for the generous support of its donors, past and present, including Columbia University's Program on Forced Migration and Health, Education Cannot Wait, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NoVo Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict (PEIC), a project of Education Above All, UNESCO, and UNICEF. GCPEA also receives support from donors who wish to remain anonymous.

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