Article36

**Tabletop exercise
On using the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and
Universities From Military Use During Armed Conflict**

A compendium of materials, reflections and notes for implementing the exercise

July 2019

For the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in Palma, Spain in May 2019, Article 36 developed a tabletop exercise for participants to discuss different scenarios featuring threats and attacks against education in armed conflict, and the military use of schools. The exercise was designed and coordinated by Article 36 in partnership with the Ministries of Defence of Spain and Argentina, and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA).

The purpose of this session was to develop understanding and discussion amongst participants of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities From Military Use During Armed Conflict, as practical tools that can be used for the protection of civilians in armed conflict. At the Palma conference, participants – from states, international organisations and civil society – were divided in to ten groups to discuss three scenarios, working in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Group facilitators were drawn from international organisations, NGOs and states.

The exercise was well received by participants as innovative and useful. It was welcomed for helping to contribute to a better understanding amongst participants of the issues, and the practical utility of the SSD and the Guidelines as instruments and commitments. The aspiration was expressed to undertake such an exercise again, at future meetings on the implementation of the SSD and on the broader agenda of protecting education from attack.

This publication contains:
- The scenario materials (the general background and the three scenarios, for distribution to participants and facilitators);
- Notes for facilitators (distributed to facilitators only, on red bordered pages);
- The SSD and Guidelines, in annex (for distribution to participants for reference); and
- Reflections on the implementation of this exercise at the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in Palma, including on the discussions had in the different groups. General points on carrying out this conference session, and notes elaborating how discussions proceeded on each scenario – which may be helpful to consider for future implementations of this exercise – are given.

The purpose of this compilation is to support the use of this exercise (or similar exercises) again at future workshops, meetings and conferences as appropriate.

These materials are free to use if credited to Article 36. For more information about this work, contact Richard Moyes (richard@article36.org).

General notes and reflections on implementing this exercise at the Third International Conference on Safe Schools in Palma, 2019:

The session timing and group division were planned in the following way:
- A fifteen-minute introduction on the purpose and format of the exercise would be given in plenary, followed by a 1 hour 15 minutes session for the exercise, which was expected to give participants around one hour of workshopping time (a longer session of 1 hour 45 was originally planned, anticipating 1 hour 30 of workshopping time – this was reduced because of other timing imperatives at the conference). A longer workshop period would have been preferable. The workshop was followed by a one hour feedback session in which some of the facilitators gave their reflections and participants were able to give their thoughts in plenary was then scheduled.
- With over 200 registered participants at the conference, participants were divided in to 10 groups of 20-30, with one working in Arabic, two in Spanish, two in French, and five in English.

In implementation:
- Around 40 minutes of workshopping time was available to participants in practice (due to the overrunning of a previous session). This was sufficient time for a productive and quite detailed discussion in every group of at least one of the scenarios, covering the major themes the materials were intended to raise.
- Nevertheless, based on feedback, more time to run the exercise is desirable in order for participants to: read and comprehend the scenarios; re-read the SSD and Guidelines during the session in order to relate these effectively to the scenarios (as participants arrived with different levels of knowledge of and familiarity with the SSD and Guidelines); cover a greater number of the scenarios; and/or go in to greater depth and reflection in their discussions.
- In general, the discussions reflected participants' support for improving the protection of civilians and of education during armed conflict. They also highlighted areas where further discussion or work to enhance participants' understandings could be beneficial, for example on neutrality and humanitarian access. Some reflections in relation to specific scenarios are given later in this publication.
- Facilitators took a mixture of effective approaches to discussing the scenarios, including: dividing their groups further in to smaller discussion groups, who were assigned or could choose to workshop one or more of the scenarios, then give feedback to the larger group; choosing one scenario for the whole group to focus on, and dividing participants in to smaller groups to consider the scenario from different perspectives according to the actors described in the scenario (military, police, parents, teachers, etc.), followed by feedback and discussion in the larger group; discussing one or more of the scenarios as a larger group. Where facilitators divided their groups in to smaller groups, some chose to mix up or group together participants of different profiles (state representatives, NGOs, international organisations).
- Facilitating participants to work in all the conference languages was considered beneficial.
- An introduction of the objectives of the session and the format of the discussions, as well as a round of introductions from participants in each group (to understand the background and expertise in the group), was also considered beneficial.

SCENARIO MATERIALS:

General background [provided to participants]

Ten years ago, violent conflict erupted in northern region of the country of Westeros. That conflict saw the destruction of homes and civilian properties, including schools and hospitals. In recent years, a stabilization force from Essos, known as *Essos Peace Force (EPF)* has been deployed to de-escalate the conflict and to monitor a number of cease fire agreements that the Government has been able to put in place with some of the armed groups. Through formal or informal channels they have ongoing communications with all of the parties to the conflict.

Recently the Westeros Government endorsed the *Safe Schools Declaration* and has issued a new "Operational Directive" prohibiting the use of schools, or attacks in the vicinity of schools, by its forces without Government Minister approval. The Government has highlighted this step at the United Nations and the move was welcomed internationally by NGOs and others.

However, hostilities continue to occur in some parts of the country and a few rebel groups have repeatedly refused to join a peace process, suspicious that they will be disenfranchised or dispersed.

The scenarios for the table-top exercise are situated within this context. The three scenarios are intended to allow participants in the Third International Conference on Safe Schools to consider the practical application of the *Safe Schools Declaration* and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. The scenarios consider in turn:

1. Precautions that might be taken to avoid damage or destruction of education services;
2. Risks from the use of schools or educational facilities for military operational purposes;
3. Responding to threats or attacks against education workers and students.

General guiding notes for facilitators [provided to facilitators]

The case studies are intended to provide openings for discussion rather than having a single clear solution.

Between them they have points of intersection with many aspects of content in the Guidelines and of the Safe Schools Declaration. There are also issues of law and humanitarian policy that should be considered. It can be emphasised that whilst the Guidelines allow some flexibility for military operations, that flexibility requires particular considerations.

The cases should highlight that it is not just the military who have a stake in the operational implementation of the Guidelines and the Declaration. The scenarios invite participants to adopt the perspectives of different actors – and although they are written as if addressed to a specific actor, the groups can be split to ask some people to adopt different roles.
The guiding notes for the scenarios also include some "possible dynamic developments" which suggest additional information or developments that facilitators might introduce into the ongoing discussion in order to motivate further thinking.

Scenario 1 – Engaging rebel forces based in a secondary school in Winterfell? [provided to participants]

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A small group of rebel troops (a group called The Starks), are reported to be positioned around the only secondary school situated at the edge of a small northern town called Winterfell. There are estimated to be approximately 50 fighters in the group.

Parts of the Secondary School continue to function as a learning centre for children during the day. However, Stark troops are thought to be based in other school buildings and have been observed moving military stores in and out.

Winterfell is one of the few towns still not fully under government control and the civilian population remains somewhat supportive of the rebel group. Some NGOs and international organisations have access to Winterfell.

The Westeros Government is frustrated at the situation and, after a number of attempts at dialogue with the Starks, is considering a military operation to quickly seize control of Winterfell. As the Government Forces Commander (North), you are responsible for the operation.

You have immediately available a company of 120 ground troops with assault rifles and light weapons, supported by three armoured fighting vehicles with 20mm guns, four mortar teams and a small number of snipers. There is also limited fixed wing air support available, equipped with unguided 1000lbs aircraft bombs.

The Essos Peace Force cannot directly engage in the mission but may provide non-combat personnel for specialist functions.

The Education Trust is a respected local NGO with international partners, supporting ongoing education in conflict affected communities. They have been providing supplies to the Secondary School but are wary of their identity being politicised.

In developing a military response to this situation:

- What actions might you consider before any attack is undertaken?
- What factors will you consider in terms of the implementation of an attack?
- What planning would you undertake for the aftermath of a military operation, and what other partners or authorities might need to be involved?
- What different perspectives or roles might be taken by the Essos Peace Force, and by the Education Trust?

Scenario 1 – Guiding notes for facilitators [provided to facilitators]

There might be a case for tactical patience in this situation, despite the government's frustrations. Consideration should be given to achieving the objective without seizing the school by force – though discussion should also be encouraged to plan for a military attack, even if patience is the preferred option.

- As per the "general background" paragraph, Ministerial approval needs to be sought.
- Warnings should be discussed.
- Timing of any attack should be discussed.
- The weapon choices available present different risks of damage to the school buildings and harm to the surrounding civilian population.
- The different weapon choices available also present different implications under IHL and with respect to instruments such as CCW Protocol V.
- Post-operation clearance of explosive hazards should look to bring in external specialist support.
- Consideration should also be given to planning for the reestablishment of education.

Possible dynamic developments

- How would you respond if international media arrived in the area and asked for a briefing on the operation?
- How would you respond if the Starks agreed to withdraw from the school buildings in exchange for safe passage to another location, to be monitored by the Essos Peace Force?

Suggested reference points of Declaration, Guidelines and other instruments

Safe Schools Declaration
- Use of the Guidelines
- Collection of data on attacks and military use of schools
- Seek to ensure continuation of education, support reestablishment of educational facilities.

Guidelines
- Guideline 3: Schools and universities must never be destroyed as a measure intended to deprive the opposing parties to the armed conflict of the ability to use them in the future. Schools and universities—be they in session, closed for the day or for holidays, evacuated or abandoned—are ordinarily civilian objects.
- Guideline 4: While the use of a school or university by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of their military effort may, depending on the circumstances, have the effect of turning it into a military objective subject to attack, parties to armed conflict should consider all feasible alternative measures before attacking them, including, unless circumstances do not permit, warning the enemy in advance that an attack will be forthcoming unless it ceases its use.
    a) Prior to any attack on a school that has become a military objective, the parties to armed conflict should take into consideration the fact that children are entitled to special respect and protection. An additional important consideration is the potential long-term negative effect on a community's access to education posed by damage to or the destruction of a school.
    b) The use of a school or university by the fighting forces of one party to a conflict in support of the military effort should not serve as justification for an opposing party that captures it to continue to use it in support of the military effort. As soon as feasible, any evidence or indication of militarization or fortification should be removed and the facility returned to civilian authorities for the purpose of its educational function.

Other instruments
- IHL, CCW Protocol V, humanitarian concerns regarding use of wide area explosive weapons in populated areas.

Reflections on discussions of Scenario 1 by participants in Palma

This was the scenario given most attention by the discussion groups (likely because it was the first in the pack, and time was limited).

General shape of discussions in the groups:
- Groups highlighted that other options should be looked in to before planning an attack, including opening dialogue/negotiations and waiting to see how the situation develops. Many emphasized that an attack should be a last resort and planners should be sure that it is the correct step. Some highlighted the need to consider the broader picture beyond achieving military goals, for example by looking at whether an attack and damage caused would be more negative for the civilian population than the current situation
- The groups noted a variety of steps they should implement to take precautions in planning an attack, such as gathering information, avoiding attacking during the day/when students are present, and issuing warnings. They highlighted prioritizing the protection of children and their education. Most also noted the need to request high level authorization for such an attack
- Several groups highlighted issues of weapons choice in minimizing damage to the school itself (so that it could be brought swiftly back in to use) and to the surrounding area. Many noted the need to avoid the use of heavy weapons or explosive weapons with wide area effects in this scenario. Some noted that strict rules of engagement should apply in built-up areas
- The groups highlighted how legal frameworks (mainly IHL) and military rules of engagement would apply. They did not generally refer to specific parts of the text of the SSD or Guidelines in their consideration of the scenario (perhaps because participants familiar with military attack planning tended to consider the general tools available to them), though were likely to refer to the general principles and commitments in the documents in considering how they should proceed in this scenario (re-establishing education, ensuring not to destroy schools, considering the protection of children and the community including its future)

Further points of interest raised by participants that might be relevant to future implementation of the exercise:
- Some military representatives noted that a decision to attack may be guided from the ground but comes through the chain of command: it may be made from a distance and difficult to reverse once the order is issued. This might change some considerations around deliberation in this scenario
- In considering post-attack measures, groups highlighted not only the need for the clearance of explosive remnants of war and the swift re-establishment of education, but also the need for other services for individuals affected such as psychological support (which is relevant for example to the commitment to victim assistance in the SSD)
- Some groups suggested that local people, NGOs or the Peace Force could be used by the military for intelligence gathering or as interlocutors, which could have potential negative implications for their neutrality and for civilian protection. Some groups highlighted that specialist NGOs such as Geneva Call could take a role in engaging non-state armed groups on adopting/using the Guidelines in this situation – though they must be acting independently. Some groups specifically considered how neutrality, including of educators, could be preserved. Some groups also suggested other tactics that might endanger the civilian population or humanitarian access, such as attempting to cut off supply lines to the group occupying the school.

Scenario 2 – Using the College of Oldtown for a military operation? [provided to participants]

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After a period of bitter fighting, the Westeros Government is finally ready to take control of the last remaining district of Oldtown that is in the hands of Stark rebels.   Dispersed in the Western Sector, the Starks have been able to hold out partly because of the narrow streets, which make it difficult for the Government's fighting vehicles to access the area.

Oldtown College, a higher education facility, sits on the perimeter of the Western Sector, adjacent to the broad main street that bi-sects the district. It consists of a number of separate buildings around open courtyards. The buildings include classrooms and administrative offices as well as specialist buildings such as science labs, and a small medical school. Given the proximity of the College to the contested area, there has been no teaching at the College for the last 12 months, but staff at the medical school have continued to provide medical services, independently, to local people.

The other buildings in this area, and with access to the main road, are small shops and houses.

You have been ordered to establish a temporary operation's base in the Oldtown College from which a concerted door-to-door operation can be mounted into the Western Sector. Commanders are expecting fierce fighting and are concerned about casualty levels, both military and civilian. The operations base will need to allow for helicopter landing (for logistics and casualty evacuation), resupply of troops with equipment and ammunition, temporary accommodation and command and control functions.

The NGO Education Trust have raised questions about this use of an education facility and, given the importance of this operation, the international news media are taking a keen interest.

As military commanders responsible for organizing the staging of this assault, what factors should be considered if you are to follow your orders responsibly?

- What limitations would you place on any use of the College buildings?
- What longer term planning would you undertake?
- With the media interest in the conduct of this operation, what additional information might you gather and what might you highlight to journalists?
- If you were journalists, or the Education Trust, what sort of questions would you be asking of the government?

Scenario 2 – guiding notes for facilitators [provided to facilitators]

The scenario seeks to make the military use of the College seem necessary – though some consideration should be encouraged as to whether that is the case.
- As per the "general background", Ministerial approval needs to be sought.
- Consideration should be given to keeping any military use of the College as short as possible, with as little disruption as possible and to ensuring that any military alterations or markings will be removed afterwards.
- Consideration should be given to the status of the re-purposed medical school. Is it a hospital or a school in this situation? Are there other buildings where disruption from military use would be particularly problematic?
- Consideration could be given to questions that the media might ask. What has happened to students who are no longer able to study at the College? How does this mission fit with the Government's high-profile endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration? When will the College be returned to proper use?

Possible dynamic developments

- If the staff of the medical school demanded a meeting to raise their concerns, how would that be approached – what might the medical staff say and how might the military prepare?
- After establishing the operations base, and after a brief period of fighting, the Starks withdraw – what are the priority tasks for re-establishing the functioning of the school? What different stakeholders need to be involved in making those plans?

Suggested reference points of Declaration, Guidelines and other instruments

Declaration
- Use of the Guidelines
- Collection of data on military use of schools
- Seek to ensure continuation of education, support reestablishment of educational facilities.

Guidelines
- Guideline 1: Functioning schools and universities should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in any way in support of the military effort.
    a) This principle extends to schools and universities that are temporarily closed outside normal class hours, during weekends and holidays, and during vacation periods.
    b) Parties to armed conflict should neither use force nor offer incentives to education administrators to evacuate schools and universities in order that they can be made available for use in support of the military effort.
- Guideline 2: Schools and universities that have been abandoned or evacuated because of the dangers presented by armed conflict should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict for any purpose in support of their military effort, except in extenuating circumstances when they are presented with no viable alternative, and only for as long as no choice is possible between such use of the school or university and another feasible method for obtaining a similar military advantage. Other buildings should be regarded as better options and used in preference to school and university buildings, even if they are not so conveniently placed or configured, except when such buildings are specially protected under International Humanitarian Law (e.g. hospitals), and keeping in mind that parties to armed conflict must always take all feasible precautions to protect all civilian objects from attack.
    a) Any such use of abandoned or evacuated schools and universities should be for the minimum time necessary.
    b) Abandoned or evacuated schools and universities that are used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of the military effort should remain available to allow educational authorities to re-open them as soon as practicable after fighting forces have withdrawn from them, provided this would not risk endangering the security of students and staff.
    c) Any traces or indication of militarisation or fortification should be completely removed following the withdrawal of fighting forces, with every effort made to put right as soon as possible any damage caused to the infrastructure of the institution. In particular, all weapons, munitions and unexploded ordnance or remnants of war should be cleared from the site.

Reflections on discussions of Scenario 2 by participants in Palma

Fewer groups discussed this scenario than Scenario 1.

General shape of discussions in the groups:
- Groups engaged closely and specifically with the content of the Guidelines and the guidance and principles they could bring to this scenario. They deliberated over whether the college could be considered abandoned and what alternatives to its use there could be, as well as articulating plans for how the college could be restored to its proper use as soon as possible (including through involving the Ministry of Education), and how the time and damage there could be limited (for example by using the college as a logistics based only rather than for fighting)
- Groups also referred to IHL and how the provision of medical services should be considered (whether this makes the college a medical facility or not, whether the staff and provision can be evacuated elsewhere – views were mixed), as well as how other civilian objects in the area could be protected
- Groups did not discuss the question of media interest a great deal – those that did concentrated on the need to demonstrate to the media the deliberations they had undertaken to protect civilians and use the college only as a last resort

Further points of interest raised by participants:
- One group suggested a multi-stakeholder committee to develop a response and normalization plan
- One group discussed avoiding military involvement in education in discussing restoring the college
- One group discussed the need for gender-sensitivity and community trust in planning
- Participants in at least one group related the scenario to real-life situations or policies in place in their own countries, and discussed the challenges of ensuring that troops were properly informed and trained about the Guidelines. Some noted that they would aim to do more work to bring the Guidelines in to training following the conference, given the possible utility of the Guidelines

Scenario 3 – Creating security for the education providers of Dorne? [provided to participants]

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The rural border district of Dorne is now under the control of the Westeros Government, but in mountainous areas there are still a few small groups of Stark rebels operating. Intelligence reports that they are primarily focused on low level criminal activity, such as theft of livestock and illicit cross-border trade, though other reports suggest they may have aspirations to regroup.

Over the last year have been a number of incidents of education providers being intimidated, and recently the situation has become more serious. A school bus bringing children from the countryside to school in town had a hand grenade thrown through the window, blinding one child and physically injuring three others. Nearby, the principle of a village primary school was shot outside the school gates by a pair of attackers who fled on a motorbike. Rumours of other incidents have spread through the population.

There has been no confirmation of who was behind these attacks, but Stark leaders have previously asserted that central government-run teaching is politicised and deliberately seeks to turn people against the Starks by portraying them as fanatics and ignoring the economic grievances they say inspired them.

Parents are becoming increasingly afraid to send their children to school, and the internationally funded NGO, Education Trust, report an increase of absenteeism. Parents are angry and the issue of child safety risks becoming a focal point for wider frustrations about the lack of local services and economic opportunities.

The local police chief has asserted that the attacks are a military matter and that the army should take the lead in responding to them. The army commander, eager to demonstrate that the national military is responsive to the local public, has offered to provide armed guards in schools and on school buses. Because violence in this area had subsided the Essos Peace Force only currently has only one observer based in Dorne.

The Dorne District Council is convening a meeting to discuss the problem.

- Who should be brought in to such a meeting?
- How might different stakeholders assess the priorities and risks in this situation – considering the different perspectives of the District Council, the police, the military, Essos Peace Force and the Education Trust?
- Develop possible strategies for a response, considering other actors or assistance that might be needed.

Scenario 3 – guiding notes for facilitators [provided to facilitators]

There are a number of ambiguities in this scenario – including whether it is actually the Starks who are behind the attacks. The general theme is to question whether further militarisation of the situation serves the area's best interests.

Encouragement could be given to thinking not only about concrete security arrangements but also to the wider social questions. Different actors may have competing interests – with the army's well-intentioned desire to be seen to be a positive force having potential benefits but also presenting risks.

The police could be encouraged to investigate these incidents as crimes – and the local police chief, as presented here is not necessarily sufficiently dynamic.

Further information could be sought on actual attacks and the media or community meetings used to brief on the situation and balance rumours with reality. The scenario raises questions about data gathering and about conflict sensitive education.

Possible dynamic developments

- A group of local parents begins protesting outside the Council, demanding that the military provide armed guards for the schools and the buses, how could the council respond?
- Rumours amongst school staff suggest that the teacher that was shot was involved in a family dispute – does this change perspectives, or does the Council risk looking soft on the Starks?

Suggested reference points of Declaration, Guidelines and other instruments

Declaration
- Use of the Guidelines
- Collection of data on attacks on education facilities, on victims, and to provide assistance
- Investigate allegations of violations of national law and prosecute where relevant
- Seek to ensure continuation of education, support reestablishment of educational facilities.
- Develop, adopt and promote 'conflict sensitive' approaches to education.

Guidelines
- Guideline 5: The fighting forces of parties to armed conflict should not be employed to provide security for schools and universities, except when alternative means of providing essential security are not available. If possible, appropriately trained civilian personnel should be used to provide security for schools and universities. If necessary, consideration should also be given to evacuating children, students and staff to a safer location.
    a) If fighting forces are engaged in security tasks related to schools and universities, their presence within the grounds or buildings should be avoided if at all possible in order to avoid compromising the establishment's civilian status and disrupting the learning environment.

Other instruments
- General protections afforded by IHL and specific protections related to medical facilities.

Reflections on discussions of Scenario 3 by participants in Palma

Fewer groups considered this scenario than Scenario 1.

General shape of discussions in the groups:
- Groups concentrated on discussing the major themes of what the role of the military should be in this situation, and how militarization could be avoided whilst providing greater protection to students and the community
- Most groups related their discussions closely to Guideline 5 and the need to avoid using the military for security for education. Various alternative solutions were proposed including civilian security and a greater role for the police. The role the peace force might be able to take within their mandate and considering Guideline 5 was also discussed. The general role that various stakeholders could take to build adherence to the principles in the Guidelines was noted by some groups
- The perspectives, priorities and needs of different stakeholders, and how these might vary and be fitted together in a solution that was best for the community rather than the priorities of any particular actor, were discussed by the groups – including the issue of how different stakeholders including the military can/should work together and communicate in this scenario

Further points of interest raised by participants:
- Some groups highlighted gendered impacts and gender-sensitivity in developing a response to this scenario
- One group highlighted the need for a mechanism to involve the students themselves in a safe and appropriate way, for example by holding a meeting before the council meeting in a safe space. The need to separately involve the non-state armed group in discussions and protection strategies, though not in the council meeting, was also highlighted

Annex 1: Safe Schools Declaration [provided to participants]

The impact of armed conflict on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and wider social challenges. Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, students, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Educational facilities have been used by parties to armed conflict as, inter alia, bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose students and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and students their right to education and so deprive communities of the foundations on which to build their future. In many countries, armed conflict continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children.

Attacks on education include violence against educational facilities, students and education personnel. Attacks, and threats of attack, can cause severe and long lasting harm to individuals and societies. Access to education may be undermined; the functioning of educational facilities may be blocked, or education personnel and students may stay away, fearing for their safety. Attacks on schools and universities have been used to promote intolerance and exclusion – to further gender discrimination, for example by preventing the education of girls, to perpetuate conflict between certain communities, to restrict cultural diversity, and to deny academic freedom or the right of association. Where educational facilities are used for military purposes it can increase the risk of the recruitment and use of children by armed actors or may leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation. In particular, it may increase the likelihood that education institutions are attacked.

By contrast, education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury and exploitation; it can alleviate the psychological impact of armed conflict by offering routine and stability and can provide links to other vital services. Education that is 'conflict sensitive' avoids contributing to conflict and pursues a contribution to peace. Education is fundamental to development and to the full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. We will do our utmost to see that places of education are places of safety.

We welcome initiatives by individual States to promote and protect the right to education and to facilitate the continuation of education in situations of armed conflict. Continuation of education can provide life-saving health information as well as advice on specific risks in societies facing armed conflict.

We commend the work of the United Nations Security Council on children and armed conflict and acknowledge the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for grave violations against children in armed conflict. We emphasize the importance of Security Council resolution 1998 (2011), and 2143 (2014) which, inter alia, urges all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and encourages Member States to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and armed non-State groups in contravention of applicable international law.

We welcome the development of the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict*. The Guidelines are non- legally binding, voluntary guidelines that do not affect existing international law. They draw on existing good practice and aim to provide guidance that will further reduce the impact of armed conflict on education. We welcome efforts to disseminate these guidelines and to promote their implementation among armed forces, armed groups and other relevant actors.

We stress the importance, in all circumstances, of full respect for applicable international law, including the need to comply with the relevant obligations to end impunity.

Recognizing the right to education and the role of education in promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations; determined progressively to strengthen in practice the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and of children and youth in particular; committed to working together towards safe schools for all; we endorse the *Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict,* and will:

- Use the *Guidelines*, and bring them into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate;
- Make every effort at a national level to collect reliable relevant data on attacks on educational facilities, on the victims of attacks, and on military use of schools and universities during armed conflict, including through existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms; to facilitate such data collection; and to provide assistance to victims, in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Investigate allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and, where appropriate, duly prosecute perpetrators;
- Develop, adopt and promote conflict-sensitive' approaches to education in international humanitarian and development programmes, and at a national level where relevant;
- Seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict, support the re-establishment of educational facilities and, where in a position to do so, provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance to programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education, including for the implementation of this declaration;
- Support the efforts of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict, and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant UN organs, entities and agencies; and
- Meet on a regular basis, inviting relevant international organisation and civil society, so as to review the implementation of this declaration and the use of the *Guidelines*.

Annex 2: Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict [provided to participants]

Parties to armed conflict are urged not to use schools and universities for any purpose in support of their military effort. While it is acknowledged that certain uses would not be contrary to the law of armed conflict, all parties should endeavour to avoid impinging on students' safety and education, using the following as a guide to responsible practice:

Guideline 1: Functioning schools and universities should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in any way in support of the military effort.

    a) This principle extends to schools and universities that are temporarily closed outside normal class hours, during weekends and holidays, and during vacation periods.

    b) Parties to armed conflict should neither use force nor offer incentives to education administrators to evacuate schools and universities in order that they can be made available for use in support of the military effort.

Guideline 2: Schools and universities that have been abandoned or evacuated because of the dangers presented by armed conflict should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict for any purpose in support of their military effort, except in extenuating circumstances when they are presented with no viable alternative, and only for as long as no choice is possible between such use of the school or university and another feasible method for obtaining a similar military advantage. Other buildings should be regarded as better options and used in preference to school and university buildings, even if they are not so conveniently placed or configured, except when such buildings are specially protected under International Humanitarian Law (e.g. hospitals), and keeping in mind that parties to armed conflict must always take all feasible precautions to protect all civilian objects from attack.

    a) Any such use of abandoned or evacuated schools and universities should be for the minimum time necessary.

    b) Abandoned or evacuated schools and universities that are used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of the military effort should remain available to allow educational authorities to re-open them as soon as practicable after fighting forces have withdrawn from them, provided this would not risk endangering the security of students and staff.

    c) Any traces or indication of militarisation or fortification should be completely removed following the withdrawal of fighting forces, with every effort made to put right as soon as possible any damage caused to the infrastructure of the institution. In particular, all weapons, munitions and unexploded ordnance or remnants of war should be cleared from the site

Guideline 3: Schools and universities must never be destroyed as a measure intended to deprive the opposing parties to the armed conflict of the ability to use them in the future. Schools and universities—be they in session, closed for the day or for holidays, evacuated or abandoned—are ordinarily civilian objects.

Guideline 4: While the use of a school or university by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of their military effort may, depending on the circumstances, have the effect of turning it into a military objective subject to attack, parties to armed conflict should consider all feasible alternative measures before attacking them, including, unless circumstances do not permit, warning the enemy in advance that an attack will be forthcoming unless it ceases its use.

a) Prior to any attack on a school that has become a military objective, the parties to armed conflict should take into consideration the fact that children are entitled to special respect and protection. An additional important consideration is the potential long-term negative effect on a community's access to education posed by damage to or the destruction of a school.

b) The use of a school or university by the fighting forces of one party to a conflict in support of the military effort should not serve as justification for an opposing party that captures it to continue to use it in support of the military effort. As soon as feasible, any evidence or indication of militarization or fortification should be removed and the facility returned to civilian authorities for the purpose of its educational function.

Guideline 5: The fighting forces of parties to armed conflict should not be employed to provide security for schools and universities, except when alternative means of providing essential security are not available. If possible, appropriately trained civilian personnel should be used to provide security for schools and universities. If necessary, consideration should also be given to evacuating children, students and staff to a safer location.

a) If fighting forces are engaged in security tasks related to schools and universities, their presence within the grounds or buildings should be avoided if at all possible in order to avoid compromising the establishment's civilian status and disrupting the learning environment.

Guideline 6: All parties to armed conflict should, as far as possible and as appropriate, incorporate these Guidelines into, for example, their doctrine, military manuals, rules of engagement, operational orders, and other means of dissemination, to encourage appropriate practice throughout the chain of command. Parties to armed conflict should determine the most appropriate method of doing this.