



“IT IS VERY PAINFUL TO TALK ABOUT”

Impact of Attacks on Education
on Women and Girls

Global Coalition to
Protect Education from Attack





Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

The **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)** was established in 2010 by organizations from the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected fragile states, higher education, protection, international human rights, and international humanitarian law who were concerned about ongoing attacks on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity.

GCPEA is governed by a Steering Committee made up of the following international organizations: CARA (Council for At Risk Academics), Human Rights Watch, Institute of International Education/IIE Scholar Rescue Fund, Plan International, Protect Education in Insecurity and Conflict, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNHCR. GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

This report is the result of independent research conducted by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual members of the Coalition and does not necessarily reflect the views of the member organizations. This report was written by Holly Cartner, gender project consultant for GCPEA, and was reviewed and supported by GCPEA staff, including Christine Choi, Jerome Marston, Diya Nijhowne, Nevena Saykova, and Marika Tsolakis, as well as members of GCPEA’s Gender Working Group, including Heather Barr, Amanda Braga, Caroline Keenan, Maleiha Malik, Kathryn Anna Moore, Juliette Myers, Aida Orgocka, Amritpal Sandhu, and Keren Simons.

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Two sisters who lost their teenage brother when in 2018 their girls' school in Nangarhar province in Eastern Afghanistan was attacked. When the first improvised explosive device went off near the school, their brother came to help. He was killed by a second delayed explosion close to the school. The school had been threatened by a militant group simply because it offered girls an education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In conflict settings around the world, children’s access to education and the corresponding potential of education to expand children’s life prospects are profoundly undermined by attacks on education and the military use of schools.¹ The impact of attacks on education is devastating for all children, but boys and girls often face different risks and may require different responses to support their recovery and return to education.²

Girl students and female teachers are often specifically targeted during attacks on schools. Over the last five years (2014-2018), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA’s) research has shown that female students and teachers were directly targeted for attack at school or along school routes in at least 18 countries facing conflict and insecurity, including in Afghanistan, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo), Egypt, India, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen.³ These attacks included bombings of girls’ schools, abduction, rape, forced “marriage” and other gender-based violence against girl students and female teachers by armed parties. During this same period, armed groups were also reportedly responsible for sexual violence in and around schools or along school routes in at least 17 countries.⁴ Not only have attacks on schools increased in the last two decades, but the proportion of attacks that are specifically targeting girls’ education appears to have increased significantly during that timeframe.⁵

¹ See UNESCO, “Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report - The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education,” 2011, <https://news.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/190743e.pdf>; “Education for All Global Monitoring Report - Children still battling to go to school,” Policy Paper 10, July 2013, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221668>; Education Policy and Data Center, “The Effects of Armed Conflict on Educational Attainment and Inequality,” Research Paper No. 18-03, April 2018, <https://www.epdc.org/sites/default/files/documents/Omoeva%20Moussa%20Hatch%20%282018%29%20-%20Impacts%20of%20conflict%20on%20education.pdf>.

² See United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) and Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Mitigating Threats to Girls’ Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts: Current Practice, October 2017, http://www.ungei.org/Girls_in_Conflict_Review-Final-Web.pdf (accessed April 12, 2019). See also UNICEF, “Girls worst affected as conflict keeps more than 25 million children out of school,” April 24, 2017, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95861.html; Global Partnership for Education, “The role of education for women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries,” June 19, 2017, <https://www.global-partnership.org/blog/role-education-women-and-girls-conflict-and-post-conflict-countries>.

³ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), “Education suffered over 14,000 armed attacks in last 5 years: Representatives from over 90 countries gather in Palma de Mallorca to build on Safe Schools Declaration,” May 26, 2019, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/news/education-suffered-over-14000-armed-attacks-last-5-years> (accessed May 27, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See for example, Pauline Rose, “Rape, murder, forced marriage: what girls in conflict zones get instead of education,” The Conversation, May 20, 2016, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/opinion-rape-murder-forced-marriage-what-girls-in-conflict-zones-get-instead-of-education> (accessed August 26, 2019), citing the Global Terrorism Database, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

In the context of armed conflict, government security forces and non-state armed groups have a variety of motives for attacking girls’ schools and for targeting female students and teachers.⁶ These motives vary depending on the context, and there may be multiple and even contradictory motives for a single attack,⁷ including ideological or religious opposition to girls’ education, hostility toward education personnel who are perceived as representing unwelcome government authority in a region, or to gain a military advantage, such as to acquire combatants or other types of support for military operations. Armed actors commit sexual violence in and along school routes as part of broader patterns of conflict-related sexual violence. They also recruit or abduct female students and teachers to “reward” combatants, such as by providing them with “wives.”

Attacks on education set in motion a range of negative consequences for girls and women such as loss of education, child and forced “marriage”, early pregnancy, and stigma associated with sexual violence and children born from war-time rape, which dramatically affect female students’ futures. These long-term consequences often exacerbate and are exacerbated by pre-existing forms of gender discrimination and harmful practices that negatively affect girls and women. Attacks on girls’ education can be an indication of pervasive inequality and discrimination, as well as harmful practices and beliefs. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has observed that in some contexts, “attacks on education may not be explicitly motivated by hostility toward girls’ education as a vehicle for gender

⁶ For more on the motives for attacks on education generally, see GCPEA, *Education Under Attack 2014*, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_o.pdf, p. 47, and GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, May 2018, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2018_full.pdf (accessed August 6, 2019), p. 26.

⁷ UNESCO, *Education Under Attack*, February 10, 2010, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186809> (accessed March 24, 2019), p. 28.



Girls attend school in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, Yemen, on October 24, 2017. The school had recently been damaged by an air strike.

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equality, but reflect, instead, the violence experienced by girls and women in all areas of their public and private lives.”⁸

Such inequality makes women and girls more vulnerable to violence during armed conflict and compromises their ability and resources to alleviate harm from such violence. The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) has noted that

Structural inequalities often intensify during periods of crisis. Because they tend to be at a lower status than men and boys and generally have less access to financial resources, social capital, and legal means to protect themselves when conflict arises, the poorest women and girls can experience greater dependency, socioeconomic disempowerment, and limited social mobility.⁹

This report presents the key findings of GCPEA’s multi-country study on the impact of attacks on education on women and girls.¹⁰ GCPEA’s research focuses on the types and causes of abuse most typically committed against female students in the context of attacks on education, and the long-term consequences that female students may face as a result of such attacks.¹¹ GCPEA initiated this study to contribute to a better understanding of the implications for girls and women when education is attacked and to inform our advocacy for better strategies to protect girls and women, prevent attacks and abuse, and diminish harmful consequences against them.

This report relies on previous GCPEA research, including *Education Under Attack 2018* and *2014*, and updates, and the organization’s field research in **Nigeria** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, which focused specifically on the experiences of women and girls when education is attacked. In addition, the report draws from interviews with numerous country and regional experts and an extensive review of secondary data sources, including reports by United Nations (UN) agencies, development and humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights organizations, government bodies, and think tanks, including numerous contributions from GCPEA’s member organizations.

Key Findings

Threats, Warnings and Attacks on Female Students

Some non-state armed groups attack female students and teachers because of ideological or religious opposition to girls’ education. There are numerous examples of non-state armed groups warning girls not to go to school and warning teachers and parents to close girls’ schools, as well as efforts to restrict female students’ and teachers’ dress and movement on the way to and from and at school. In Yemen, for example, education personnel reported an increase in the number of threats against schools on social media in November 2017, including WhatsApp messages threatening that schools would be bombed if girls continued to attend school. Similarly, non-state armed groups have carried out a violent campaign against girls’ schools in some regions of Pakistan. In 2015, for example, the Pakistani Taliban sent letters to schools in the Swat region warning the school

⁸ OHCHR, “Background Paper on Attacks Against Girls Seeking to Access Education,” February 2015, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Report_attacks_on_girls_Feb2015.pdf (accessed March 14, 2019), p. 14.

⁹ UNGEI and ODI, “Mitigating Threats to Girls’ Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts,” p.4.

¹⁰ For more detailed information and original source references, please refer to the body of the report.

¹¹ GCPEA defines attacks on education as any intentional threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons—against students, educators, and education institutions. Attacks on education may be perpetrated by State security forces, including armed forces, law enforcement, paramilitary, and militia forces acting on behalf of the state, as well as by non-state armed groups. Attacks on education include attacks on students of all ages, educators, including schoolteachers, academics, other education personnel, members of teacher unions, and education aid workers. Attacks on education also include attacks on education institutions: any site used for the purposes of education, including all levels of education and non-formal education facilities, and buildings dedicated to the work of ministries of education and other education administration. For more detail, see Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/what-attack-education>.



School girl in Surkhrod District, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. Her family fled intense fighting in the Shinwar district of Nangarhar province. “Our school was burned, destroyed,” she says. By the time they left, though, she couldn’t attend classes anyway. “Girls weren’t allowed to go to school.” 10 April 2019.

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administration to close schools or face attack.¹² In a statement in 2017, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, noted with regard to Afghanistan that the Taliban had directly threatened girls’ education and that “similar threats against female teachers or girls were received in Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic.”¹³

When girls continue to try to pursue their education despite warnings, armed parties have responded with violence, damaging or destroying their school structures, as well as educational materials. For example, anti-government groups in **Afghanistan** have repeatedly targeted girls’ schools. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that the Taliban attacked five mixed or girls’ high schools in 2018, including “the burning of schools and the detonation of IEDs [improvised explosive devices] inside the facilities.”¹⁴ Similarly, UNAMA reported four Taliban attacks on girls’ schools in the first quarter of 2019, which “spread fear” among

¹² Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers, and Schools in Pakistan,” March 2017, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/pakistan0317_web_o.pdf (accessed May 4, 2019), p. 43.

¹³ Statement by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Security Council Arrria Meeting on Attacks on Schools, October 16, 2017, <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/statement-by-virginia-gamba-security-council-arria-meeting-on-attacks-on-schools/> (accessed April 23, 2019).

¹⁴ UNAMA, “Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018,” February 2019, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_annual_protection_of_civilians_report_2018_-_23_feb_2019_-_english.pdf (accessed March 20, 2019), p.15.



Survivors of attack on their primary school in Kazumba territory in Kasai Central Province, Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2016.

© Holly Cartner, October 2018

girls and their families and “led to school closures, affecting education for almost 3000 girls.”¹⁵

Armed parties hostile to girls’ education have also violently attacked female students, both at school and while traveling to or from school. Human Rights Watch reported that in October 2012, militants in Pakistan stopped a school van carrying students on their way to take an exam and “threw acid on the faces of the female students. At least two girls sustained severe burns to their faces.”¹⁶ The local Pakistani Taliban commander reportedly told CNN that: ““We will never allow the

girls of this area to go and get a Western education. If and when we find any girl from Parachinar going to university for an education, we will target her [in] the same way, so that she might not be able to unveil her face before others.”¹⁷

In other contexts, armed parties may consider schools, and by extension education personnel, as representatives of the government. These groups may not be hostile to education or to girls’ education per se but may nevertheless target women and girls in ways that are unique to them or that disproportionately affect them.

Sexual Violence Against Female Students at School or On School Routes

Armed parties have perpetrated sexual violence on school routes, including as part of broader patterns of conflict-related sexual violence. Human Rights Watch reported in 2012 that many parents in Somalia, were not willing to send their daughters to school because of the risk of sexual violence on the way to and from school.¹⁸ In July 2019, for example, a nine-year-old girl, going to school in Raga Ceel, Somalia, was raped and badly tortured by a security personnel. The suspect escaped.¹⁹ Similarly, the UN expressed concern about efforts by extremist groups in Mali to impose a strict religious ideology and force the closure of many secular schools.²⁰ According to the UN, girls who failed to “adhere to strict dress requirements imposed by armed groups” were targeted in 2018 for violence in schools, including sexual violence.²¹

“One of the militiamen followed me into the bush and was threatening me. If I did not agree to what he wanted, he said he would kill me. What he did to me was so painful. I could not stop crying. He threatened me to keep quiet. After he finished, he went away and left me lying on the ground.”

—Chloé M., an 11-year-old student when her school was attacked in Kazumba territory, Congo, in December 2016

GCPEA interview, Bilomba, Congo, October 30, 2018.

Although there is limited data on prevalence rates, GCPEA’s research indicates that armed parties commit sexual violence during attacks on schools or while students are fleeing an attack. Armed parties may target both male and female students, as well as teachers, but in most of the contexts GCPEA has reviewed, armed parties appear to disproportionately target adolescent girls and young women for sexual violence, when schools are attacked.²² Kamuina Nsapu militiamen in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) raped female students and school staff during attacks on schools or when girls were fleeing an attack. In early March 2017, for example, the Kamuina Nsapu militia attacked a post-secondary institute in Luiza province and assaulted the students, raping ten of the female students and a female administrator, and killing a male department head. Noelle A., a student at the school, told GCPEA how the militiamen had beaten the boy students and then raped the girl students. They were then warned

never to go to school again.²³

¹⁵ UNAMA, “Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 31 March 2019,” April 24, 2019, https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_-_first_quarter_report_2019_english_.pdf (accessed May 3, 2019), p. 3.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares,” pp. 35-6.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ GCPEA consultations, Mogadishu, November 2018.

¹⁹ Local source, as cited in Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ID Number 5554809, [https://www.acledata.com/data/\(data,](https://www.acledata.com/data/(data,) (accessed August 14, 2019).

²⁰ Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in Mali: Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali,” January 21, 2019, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/77> (accessed August 24, 2019), para. 55

²¹ Theirworld, “10 countries where girls’ education has been under attack,” <https://theirworld.org/news/10-countries-where-girls-education-has-been-attacked> (accessed March 24, 2019).

²² Sexual violence is believed to be underreported because of the associated stigma. It should be noted, however, that there is even less research investigating the prevalence of sexual violence against boys and men, and there is growing recognition that this is an issue demanding greater monitoring and documentation. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, “Men Can Experience Sexual Violence in War Too,” May 3, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/03/men-can-experience-sexual-violence-war-too> (accessed May 15, 2019). Therefore, although most data seem to indicate that sexual violence in most conflicts disproportionately affects girls and women, there are significant limitations to current data on this issue.

²³ GCPEA interview with Victor N., Luiza, October 28, 2018, reported in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost: Impact of Attacks on Education for Women and Girls in Kasai Central Province, Democratic Republic of Congo,” April 2019, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/drc_kasai_attacks_on_women_and_girls.pdf, p. 36. The names of survivors and witnesses interviewed by GCPEA who are quoted in this report have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Other de-



Students who were abducted in February 2018 from their school in Dapchi, Nigeria, and spent a month in captivity.

© Timothy Yohanna Ali, March 2018

Abduction, Forced Marriage, Sexual Slavery

In other cases, girl students and female teachers have been abducted from their schools by armed parties. Some of those women and girls interviewed by GCPEA were held for periods ranging from several hours to days; in other cases, they were held for years or have never been heard from since the abduction. Boko Haram,²⁴ for example, gained international notoriety in 2014, when it abducted 276 girls from their school in Chibok, Nigeria; as of this writing, the whereabouts of more than 100 of the girls remains unknown.²⁵ In total, GCPEA

tails, including the names of the villages, have not been included to protect the identity of interviewees.

²⁴ Boko Haram, the popular name for the Islamist insurgency group, is a Hausa phrase that has been loosely interpreted as “Western education is forbidden.” For more detail, see GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School: The Impact of Attacks on Education for Nigerian Women and Girls,” October 2018, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/attacks_on_nigerian_women_and_girls.pdf, footnotes 17-18.

²⁵ See “Five years on more than 100 Chibok girls still missing,” TRTWorld, April 13, 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/five-years-on-more-than-100-chibok-girls-still>

estimates that Boko Haram has abducted at least 600 girls from their schools over the course of the 10-year conflict.²⁶ Armed parties in other countries, including Somalia, Congo, and South Sudan, have also abducted girls from schools.

“I was so young and innocent. I had such pain. I cried and cried, but he continued to rape me ... I continue to have pain to this day.”

—Aisha Y., 13 at the time she was abducted from her school and raped repeatedly after being forcibly married to a Boko Haram fighter

GCPEA interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria, October 10, 2017.

Girls who are abducted may be raped and then abandoned or forcibly “married” to one or multiple fighters. Some have reported being held for extended periods of time for purposes of sexual slavery. In February 2018, almost four years after the Chibok abductions, Boko Haram abducted 111 girl students from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in Dapchi, in northeast Nigeria.²⁷ Five girls were crushed to death during the abduction. Boko Haram returned all but one of the girls about a month later; one girl was not returned reportedly because she refused to convert to Islam. The UN reported that the schoolgirls were subjected “to forced “marriage”, rape and physical and emotional violence.”²⁸ Similarly, in Somalia, Al-Shabaab insurgents have kidnapped girls from schools and forced them to “marry” fighters. One teacher from Mogadishu told Human Rights Watch that Al-Shabaab came to his school, separated the boys from the girls, and then “picked 15- and 16-year-old girls, one was 17 years old. They took 12 girls in total. These girls were taken to be wives...”²⁹

Forced Recruitment

Armed forces and non-state armed groups may target educational institutions to gain a military advantage, such as to fill or replenish their ranks and may view schools as convenient places to recruit children as combatants. Girls and women who were abducted from schools (or along school routes) in the countries analyzed by GCPEA appear to have been abducted primarily for sexual violence and forced “marriage.” (See discussion on sexual violence above) However, non-state armed groups also sometimes forcibly recruit girls and women from schools to support their military operations, including by cooking, cleaning and carrying supplies.

Girls who are forcibly recruited are used in military operations in a variety of ways, including in direct combat or as suicide bombers.³⁰ In the Kasai region of the Congo, young girls were recruited by the Kamuina Nsapu militia because they were believed to be able to magically stop bullets by rustling their skirts; they were placed at the front of the militia units going into battle as human shields. In northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has used women and children as suicide bombers. Experts believe that many of these children had been abducted

“I was given a wooden [kitchen utensil] that was supposed to be a magic gun that the soldiers could not defeat.... After that, I went with [the militia] wherever they went and participated in several battles. I later realized that we would not be able to defeat soldiers with the magic. They were killing us in large numbers.”

—Lucia N. recruited by the Kamuina Nsapu militia in the Congo

missing-25816 (accessed August 28, 2019). VOA News, “112 Abducted Nigerian School Girls Still in Captivity Five Years Later,” March 27, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/episode/112-abducted-nigerian-school-girls-still-captivity-five-years-later-3791701> (accessed August 28, 2019).

²⁶ GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” October 2018, p. 21.

²⁷ See Government Girls Science and Technical College – Dapchi (February 19, 2018), in GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” pp. 29-31.

²⁸ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2019/280, March 29, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2019), para.119.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, No Place for Children: Child Recruitment, Forced Marriage, and Attacks on Schools in Somalia,” February 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/02/20/no-place-children/child-recruitment-forced-marriage-and-attacks-schools-somalia> (accessed June 6, 2019), pp. 55-6.

³⁰ Although some women choose to join armed groups for a variety of reasons, this section deals only with those female students or teachers who were forcibly recruited. To the extent that those being recruited are under the age of 18, they are considered for purposes of this report to be forcibly recruited and to be used in violation of international law. For those children who are under the age of 15, their recruitment and use is a war crime. (See Annex I, Obligations Under International Law).



The children are told the broomsticks are magic and can protect them from enemy fire. Kasai Province, Democratic Republic of Congo.

© 2018 Roland Leon Sunday Mirror

previously, including from schools. In 2018, the UN reported that “Boko Haram continued to recruit children and used 48 (38 girls) for the purpose of bearing and detonating improvised explosive devices...”³¹

Attacks on Female Teachers

When schools are attacked, female teachers may face abuse that is specific to their gender. While both female and male teachers are targeted by non-state armed groups that oppose the way that education is being provided or are hostile toward institutions perceived as representing government authority, female teachers can face gender-specific types of attacks, including rape, sexual slavery, forced “marriage”, and threats or attacks related to prescribing their dress or freedom of movement. When groups are specifically hostile to girls’ education, teachers of girl students, whether female or male, are also targeted.

“It is very painful to talk about. I had three different husbands.... Even now, I cannot forget the smell, the odor, the horror of them coming to rape me. If you tried to resist – to say no – they would just put a gun to your head and threaten to shoot you. And then they would rape you anyway. It was sexual slavery.”

—Sadiya S., a young teacher abducted from her school in Damasak, Nigeria and held for three years by Boko Haram

GCPEA interview, Maiduguri, Nigeria, February 11, 2018.

Attacks on teachers can take many different forms. Non-state armed groups may exert pressure on teachers and school administrators to teach a curriculum different than the government-approved one, or they may prescribe teacher conduct and dress in conformity with their religious or cultural tenets. Conservative religious groups, for example, may demand segregation of students by gender and insist that only women can

³¹ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC (accessed August 10, 2019), para. 207.

teach girl students, or may not allow female teachers to work at all. For example, in March 2017, Mada Masr reported that Sinai Province fighters in Egypt had “stopped a bus traveling from North Sinai’s Arish to schools in nearby Rafah,” and threatened the teachers with whipping and mutilation with acid if they did not agree to follow an “Islamic dress code” and to “travel accompanied by a male relative.”³² Similarly, the UN reported that in March 2017, unidentified individuals vandalized the Oxford Public School, in the Ghizer Valley of **Pakistan**, and threatened to bomb the school if female teachers did not cover themselves.”³³

Female teachers may also experience the same abuses as their female students, including rape, abduction, forced “marriage,” and recruitment. For example, when Boko Haram attacked the Zanna Mobarti Primary School in Damasak, Nigeria, in November 2014, some teachers were abducted along with several hundred children. Sadiya S., a young teacher at the school, was held in captivity for three years, during which time she was kept in a locked room for extended periods of time and raped repeatedly.³⁴

“The militia were coming to the school regularly to check whether soldiers were in our school. When they came, we ran away... When the soldiers came, they were also looking for militia members, who they suspected of being in our school... Finally, I decided to get christened [and join the militia] to protect myself.”

—Elodie N., a 15-year-old female student from a village near Kananga, Congo
GCPEA interview, Kananga, Congo, November 4, 2018.

Military Use of Schools

GCPEA has previously noted that “government security forces and non-state armed groups are often attracted by the location, solid structure, and ready facilities found in schools, universities, and other education institutions, and use “these sites in a variety of ways, including as military bases, shelters, weapons caches, and outposts.”³⁵ The presence of armed parties, whether a non-state armed group or a government force, in and around schools, exposes students and teachers to increased risks, including the risk of retaliatory attacks. The military use of schools increases the risk that school buildings and infrastructure will be damaged or destroyed, that teaching and other supplies will be looted, and that both students and teaching staff will be too afraid to go to the school, increasing the likelihood that education will be disrupted.

The presence of armed forces in or near schools also increases the risk that students will be exposed to a range of abuse, including violence and recruitment. It presents particular dangers for female students, including a heightened risk of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

In the context of armed conflict, both government security forces and non-state armed groups have used schools for military purposes, including as detention areas, and have held and raped women and girls in the schools. For example, in Iraq the UN reported in January 2017 that the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) had used schools for military purposes including to house abducted Yazidi women until they could be sold off to fighters for sexual slavery. As of the end of 2018, the Kurdistan Regional Government estimated that there were “1,427 women and girls” still missing.³⁶ In Myanmar, the Tatmadaw (government armed forces) used schools to detain ethnic Rohingya during the October 2016 violence in northern Rakhine State; Tatmadaw soldiers reportedly took women and girls to schools, among other places, and raped them. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in 2017 that it had documented numerous rapes in a number of contexts, including that “women and



Pakistani students in Lahore return to school under high alert security after the December 16, 2014 attack by the Pakistani Taliban on the Army Public School in Peshawar, January 1, 2015.

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girls would be rounded up by military and several of them would be taken to nearby schools, mosques, houses or the forest/jungle to be gang raped.”³⁷

Long-Term Consequences

Abuses are committed against female students and teachers during attacks on schools and following abduction or recruitment from schools. But the suffering and impact does not end there; girls and young women often continue to experience a wide range of harmful repercussions long after the immediate attack, including loss of education, child and forced “marriage”, early pregnancy, and stigma associated with sexual violence and children born of war-time rape.

Lost Education

One of the most devastating long-term impacts for girls is often the loss of education. As discussed throughout this report, girls’ access to education is, not surprisingly, severely hampered by deteriorating security. The long-term consequences of attacks on education create almost insurmountable obstacles for girls to return to school or enjoy the benefits associated with gaining an education. Plan International has reported that, “if current

³² No safe routes to schools: Sinai teachers intercepted by Islamic State loyalists,” Mada Masr, March 5, 2017, (accessed August 15, 2019). See also, “Province of Sinai militants release footage of religious policing in North Sinai,” Mada Masr, March 29, 2017, <https://madasmasr.com/en/2017/03/29/news/u/province-of-sinai-militants-release-footage-of-religious-policing-in-north-sinai/> (accessed August 23, 2019)

³³ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict,” S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_72_865_s_2018_465.pdf (accessed April 20, 2019), para. 238.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁵ See GCPEA, “Protecting Schools and Universities From Military Use,” <http://www.protectingeducation.org/restricting-military-use-and-occupation>.

³⁶ UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2019/280, para. 50.

³⁷ OHCHR, Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 (Geneva: OHCHR, February 3, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf>, pp. 21.



Delphine Bikajuri is principal of GEPS Youpwe, a government primary school in Douala, Cameroon. Her daughter was kidnapped from her high school along with 150 other students.

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“[After the attack], I went home. I was too afraid and decided not to go back. I told my parents I would never go back to school.... Before [the attack], I was so passionate to study and achieve my dream [of being a lawyer]. But now, this experience completely demoralized me...”

—Hauwa M., a 16-year-old student when her school was attacked in northeastern Nigeria
GCPEA interview, Damaturu, Nigeria, February 7, 2018.

trends continue, by 2030 only one in three girls in crisis-affected countries will have completed upper secondary school.”³⁸ As the security situation worsens in and around schools, parents often pull their children out of school as a precautionary measure. During its field research, GCPEA heard repeatedly from parents, teachers, and students that parents are often more worried about the safety of their daughters, especially due to increased risks of sexual violence, and generally more likely to keep their daughters out of school due to insecurity.

Armed conflict in general and attacks on teachers specifically result in teachers fleeing insecure areas; the absence of trained teachers is an additional obstacle to ensuring uninterrupted access to education in emergency settings. Targeted attacks on female teachers create additional barriers for girls’ education, especially in contexts in which parents will not allow their daughters to attend school with male teachers or armed parties insist that girls only be taught by female teachers. When girls’ education is suspended or ended prematurely due to attacks on schools and teachers, there are long-term consequences for the training of future generations of female teachers.³⁹

Being out of school for even a short period renders girls and young women vulnerable to many risks, including child and forced “marriage”, which further diminishes the chance for girls to return to school due to pregnancy, parenting, household responsibilities, or husbands, in-laws, or schools forbidding them to return. The UN Team of International Experts on the situation in the Kasai, Congo, reported that there had been an increase in early marriages in the region as a result of the conflict.⁴⁰ Similarly, virtually all principals interviewed by GCPEA in the province of Kasai Central reported that there had been an increase in child marriages of girl students from their schools. The principals stressed that widespread sexual violence during the conflict had caused parents to fear

that their daughters would not be able to marry if they were victims of rape. As a result, parents had increasingly opted to marry their daughters early as a perceived form of protection.⁴¹

Stigma and Social Exclusion

Women and girls who have suffered abduction, forcible recruitment, sexual violence and a range of other abuse, experience serious long-term mental and physical health consequences. Their suffering is often compounded by the stigma and social exclusion that they suffer as victims of sexual violence, as well as their perceived association with militia groups. Ridicule and rejection by family and friends is particularly painful; stigma often prevents survivors from returning to school and seeking medical and psycho-social care. Even girls and young women who have overcome multiple obstacles to return to school after an attack often face

significant barriers to reintegration and suffer pervasive stigma, emotional distress, and trauma that negatively affect their learning outcomes. Many continue to feel insecure in school and on school routes long after the attack.⁴²

* * *

³⁸ Plan International, “Left Out, Left Behind: Adolescent girls’ secondary education in crises,” June 2019, <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-uk-left-out-left-behind-reportpdf/download?token=g5uBr7L5> (accessed September 24, 2019), p. 8.

³⁹ See Robin Kirk, “The Impact of Women Teachers on Girls’ Education: Advocacy Brief,” (UNESCO: 2006), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000145990>. See also Plan International, “Left Out, Left Behind: Adolescent girls’ secondary education in crises.”

⁴⁰ Human Rights Council, “Detailed Report of the Team of International Experts on the situation in the Kasais (Rapport détaillé de l’Equipe d’experts internationaux sur la situation au Kasai),” A/HRC/38/CRP.1, June 29, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1637440?ln=en> (accessed September 8, 2018),” para. 416.

⁴¹ GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” April 2019, pp. 45-47.

⁴² Plan International, “Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Lake Chad Basin,” August 2018, <https://plan-international.org/publications/adolescent-girls-crisis-lake-chad-basin#download-options> (accessed September 22, 2019).



A student goes over blackboard notes for a class in emergency preparedness in case of armed attack at a school in Baigai, a village near the Nigerian border in Cameroon's Far North region.

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All girls and women have the right to education without fear of threat, harassment, abduction, forced recruitment or sexual and gender-based violence. Governments have a responsibility to protect schools and ensure that they are safe for students and teachers and to adopt effective measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish serious human rights violations. This includes an obligation to protect female students and teachers from the recruitment, abduction, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment documented in this report, and to develop more effective responses to alleviate the harm that many have suffered due to these abuses.⁴³

The Safe Schools Declaration is a tool that all countries should endorse and implement in a gender-responsive way to take into account the specific ways that females are targeted and/or impacted by attacks on education.⁴⁴ The following recommendations draw on GCPEA's recommendations in previous reports such as its guidance on gender-responsive implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, *What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions*.⁴⁵

Priority Recommendations

Governments should adopt a no-tolerance approach to attacks on education, including abuses against girls and women in the context of such attacks, as a matter of utmost urgency.

As an overarching recommendation, GCPEA calls on all governments to endorse and implement the *Safe Schools Declaration*,⁴⁶ including by taking immediate steps to account for the specific needs and experiences of female students and education personnel. The international community, particularly UN agencies, donor governments, and international humanitarian actors, should support national governments to fully implement the commitments in the Declaration in a gender-responsive manner.

⁴³ The abuses documented in this report violate a number of rights enshrined in international law. The right to life, security of person and bodily integrity, and the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are guaranteed by numerous international human rights treaties. Sexual violence, which may include rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage and pregnancy, is recognized as a violation of these fundamental rights.

⁴⁴ These recommendations were reviewed by GCPEA's working group on protecting women and girls, which is comprised of education in emergencies and gender experts from a range of UN agencies and international NGOs. The recommendations are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

⁴⁵ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions," 2018, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_can_be_done_to_better_protect_women_and_girls.pdf; and "Technical Guide: What Teachers and School Administrators Can Do to Protection Education from Attack," April 2017, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/technical_guide_2017.pdf. http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_ministries.pdf. See also, GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," September 2016, pp. 38-39, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf, (accessed August 30, 2017); and "What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education from Attack," December 2015.

⁴⁶ The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express support for protecting education from attack during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of safe education during war; and the implementation of concrete measures to deter the military use of schools. See Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict," <http://www.protectingeducation.org/safeschoolsdeclaration>.

In addition, GCPEA urges the following priority action to end attacks on education and address the specific impact of these attacks on women and girls (see also Expanded Recommendations, which include citations).

To Government Authorities

- **Prioritize the protection of civilians in conflict.** Take immediate steps to prevent abductions and sexual violence against female students and education personnel and ensure that this priority is translated into effective military and civilian policies, including by giving a standing order to security forces to respond immediately to calls for help and protection when an attack is imminent or underway at a school;
- **End military use of schools.** Ensure the full implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict as a minimum standard and train national defense and security forces on the prohibition of sexual violence and on ending the use of educational institutions for military purposes;
- **Create systematic early warning systems.** Provide school administrators, students, teachers, Ministry of Education personnel, and local communities with accurate, up-to-date security information, including specific information on the risks of sexual violence; and enlist the input of those most affected by attacks on schools, including girls and teachers, to create early warning systems and participatory risk mapping and planning;
- **Ensure that schools and non-formal education settings have emergency communication protocols.** Improved communications systems are essential, especially in remote areas, to enable school administrators, teachers, and other education personnel to alert students, and where possible caregivers, and take appropriate action when a threat is imminent.
- **Investigate and prosecute sexual violence.** Impartially investigate and prosecute alleged perpetrators of attacks on education, including sexual violence committed against students and teachers in the context of such attacks, and hold accountable any high-level officers who knew or should have known about abuses committed by those under their command but did not take appropriate action. Ensure that anyone convicted of such crimes is prohibited from remaining in or rejoining the security forces in any location;
- **Invest in emergency preparedness training** and monitoring capacity. Provide teachers and other formal and non-formal education personnel with appropriate emergency preparedness training, including by conducting regular school drills and review of security protocols, to ensure that students and staff understand what types of events trigger an emergency response and to enhance their ability to implement relevant security protocols;
- **Strengthen monitoring and reporting.** Strengthen and systematize data collection related to school security, including on specific threats to female students and teachers. Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on formal and non-formal education and military use of schools and universities, including by collecting and reporting data that is disaggregated by gender, age, level(s) of formal and/or non-formal education, as well as type of school (all-girl, all-boy, mixed) affected;
- **Report on sexual violence.** Document and report incidents of sexual violence, and include the location of the violence at school or on route to school, and during or in the wake of an attack on a school, so that this violence can be captured as attacks on education; and
- **Develop targeted reintegration interventions.** Develop a comprehensive strategy, of adequate duration and backed by sufficient funding, for the reintegration of women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, abductions, or recruitment and use, as well as their children born of wartime rape. Include measures to increase availability of and access to services for the physical and psychological treatment of sexual violence;

To Leaders of Non-State Armed Groups

- **Cease attacks on schools.** End all attacks on education, including attacks on schools, students, and teachers, and the specific abuses against female students, teachers and other education personnel documented in this report;
- **End all recruitment and use of children.** Stop recruitment and use of children under 18 years of age and suspend from their positions, pending investigations, any commanders who are credibly alleged to have recruited and used child soldiers, including the use of girls for any reason;
- **Prevent sexual and gender-based violence.** Take all steps necessary to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) by combatants, including by halting all forced and child marriages, and hold combatants accountable, in accordance with international standards; and
- **Comply with international law.** Take all measures necessary to ensure that combatants strictly comply with international humanitarian law and the principles of international human rights law, including by issuing command orders, adopting internal policies, or creating a code of conduct that incorporate international humanitarian law obligations regarding the protection of education and the prohibition against sexual violence and recruitment and use of children.

To the International Community

- **Support recommendations in this report.** Privately and publicly urge relevant governments to adopt the recommendations included in this report, and increase donor and humanitarian agency support for the interventions recommended;
- **Support enhanced protection measures.** Expand support for enhanced security measures, including emergency communications systems, especially for rural communities, systematic early warning systems, the development of comprehensive school-based safety and security plans, and programs to provide security training for educators and students;
- **Support school security as component of UN peacekeeping mandates.** Ensure that peacekeeping missions have the mandate where relevant and the capacity to monitor, report, and respond to attacks on schools, military use of schools, and abductions and recruitment of students and education personnel.
- **Support specialized outreach to female victims of attacks on education.** Support the expansion of specialized outreach to female survivors of attacks on education, including those who have suffered from recruitment, abduction, sexual violence, and other abuses documented in this report, in order to identify the numbers of survivors and their specific needs. Continue to support, and where possible, expand the provision of medical and psychosocial assistance to survivors of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs and experiences of women and girls;
- **Support targeted reintegration interventions.** Support the development of comprehensive country-specific strategies, of adequate duration and backed by sufficient funding, for the reintegration of girls formerly associated with non-state armed groups;
- **Support international accountability measures.** Continue to promote and support international accountability measures with relevant governments, including through international channels, such as the International Criminal Court, the UN Human Rights Council, UN Security Council, and UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies, among others; and
- **Support efforts to strengthen monitoring and reporting at national level.** International organizations and influential governments should advocate with conflict-affected governments to strengthen and systematize data collection related to school security, including data on specific threats to the safety of female students and teachers and incidents and threats of sexual violence that occur at or on the way to schools, or before, during, or in the wake of an attack on a school, so that this violence can also be captured as attacks on education.



Names of missing Chibok school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram insurgency five years ago are displayed during the 5th year anniversary of their abduction, in Abuja, Nigeria April 14, 2019.

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METHODOLOGY

This report presents the findings of GCPEA’s multi-country study on the impact of attacks on education on women and girls, which GCPEA initiated because our research showed that girls and women are affected differently by attacks on education and military use of schools and universities than boys and men and may require different responses to support their recovery and return to education. GCPEA initiated this study to contribute to a better understanding of the implications for girls and women when education is attacked and to inform our advocacy for better strategies to protect, prevent attacks and abuse, and alleviate harmful consequences for girls and women specifically.

The report discusses the types of abuse GCPEA has documented that are most typically committed against female students and teachers in the context of attacks on education. It is based on GCPEA’s research, including Education Under Attack 2018 and 2014, and updates, and the organization’s field research in **Nigeria** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, which focused specifically on the experiences of women and girls when education is attacked. In addition, the report draws from interviews with numerous country and regional experts and an extensive review of secondary data sources, including reports released by UN agencies, development and humanitarian NGOs, human rights organizations, government bodies, and think tanks, including numerous contributions from GCPEA’s member organizations.

While this paper draws on available information on the gender-specific impact of attacks on education, there are limitations to the available information. It should be noted that the types of impact described in this paper may be more prevalent in some conflicts and occurring in a greater number of conflicts, than is reflected in available data. As is well known, sexual violence is often significantly underreported, and when it is reported, it rarely includes information about whether the violence took place en route to or from or at school. The UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict collects relevant information, including on sexual violence against children, recruitment and use of children, and attacks on schools. The Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence collects information on sexual violence, including in the context of education, although the location of the violence within a school may not always be captured. To the extent possible, the MRM gives details about other grave violations that may occur during attacks on education and therefore seeks to document the nexus between specific grave violations against children; however, this may not always be possible as a result of too few available monitors, especially during peak crisis periods, as well as limited access and inadequate security, which may impede the ability to document the nexus. Improved monitoring and reporting of the nexus between specific violations, such as sexual violence that occurs during a school attack, or recruitment during such an attack, is needed.



A former child combatant, age 14, who used to be a member of the anti-balaka sits outside her school building in Bambari, Central African Republic. UNICEF helped the girl leave the armed group to pursue her education.

© 2015 Tom Esslemont/REUTERS/ Thomson Reuters Foundation



Palestinian girls attend class at a school in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on September 5, 2015. The school was damaged during Israeli Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014.

© 2015 Said Khatib/AFP/ Getty Images

INTRODUCTION

Although there is growing recognition around the world that girls’ education is critical for countries’ economic development and long-term peace and security, armed conflict frequently interferes with girls’ ability to get the education they long for and desperately need.⁴⁷ Attacks on education and military use of schools by armed parties have a devastating effect on all children and further impede their ability to acquire an education. Girls are often specifically targeted during attacks on schools and suffer gender-specific consequences. The long-term repercussions of attacks on education can affect female students differently and disproportionately.

In *Education Under Attack 2018*, GCPEA reported that, in the period 2013-2017, “Girls and women were uniquely targeted because of their gender, not only as victims of sexual violence but also where armed groups opposed female education. Girls and women were targets of attacks on education because of their gender in at least 18 of the 28 countries profiled in the report: Afghanistan, Cameroon, CAR, Colombia, DRC, Egypt, India, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen.”⁴⁸ Not only have attacks on schools increased in the last two decades, but the proportion of attacks that are specifically targeting girls’ education appears to have increased significantly during that timeframe. One report indicated, for example, that “not only have attacks on schools increased 17-fold between

⁴⁷ See UNGEI and ODI, “Mitigating Threats to Girls’ Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts.” See also UNICEF, “Girls worst affected as conflict keeps more than 25 million children out of school,” April 24, 2017, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95861.html; Global Partnership for Education, “The role of education for women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries,” June 19, 2017, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/role-education-women-and-girls-conflict-and-post-conflict-countries>.

⁴⁸ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2018*, May 2018, p. 10. See also GCPEA, “Education suffered over 14,000 armed attacks in last 5 years,” May 26, 2019.

2000 and 2014, but there have been three times as many attacks on girls’ schools than boys’ schools in recent years.”⁴⁹

Attacks on education and military use of schools are destructive for all students. When education is attacked, women and girls often experience different kinds of abuse, and the abuses committed against them may have different long-term consequences. Even when they are not specifically targeted because of their gender, the consequences of attacks on education are often different for women and girls. In insecure settings, parents are more likely to take their daughters out of school than their sons, and to do so earlier in the conflict. When schools are attacked or students are attacked on school routes, parents are especially reluctant to expose their daughters to the risk of sexual violence. Furthermore, when conflict-exacerbated poverty limits parents’ ability to pay for all their children’s education, boys’ education is often given priority.

This paper focuses on targeted attacks on girls’ education that occur in the context of armed conflict, and attacks on education in which the impact is different or disproportionate for female students and teachers. However, it should be noted that even when attacks are not specific to girls’ education, and the impact is the same for both boys and girls, the long-term consequences for girls may be different. In countries such as Syria and Yemen, for example, where many attacks on schools are through aerial bombardment, school buildings and infrastructure are routinely damaged, and both boy and girl students suffer injury and death. In such contexts, girls may nevertheless experience different and even disproportionate long-term impact, such as forced and child marriage, early pregnancy, and lost education, as will be discussed below. UNGEI has noted that one of the threats to girls’ education that is directly linked to conflict is the “targeted attacks and collateral damage that can result in injury” and the “military use of buildings and use of school buildings by displaced populations.”⁵⁰

Girls who are forced to interrupt or end their education prematurely suffer profound and long-term consequences. The right to education is recognized as a multiplier right, which is not only critical in and of itself, but “enables right-holders to access a wide range of human rights.”⁵¹ Education is also an entry point for critical child protection, health, and psychosocial services. When girls and young women are denied their right to education, they lose the opportunities afforded by education, including personal and economic independence and fulfillment, greater confidence in their relationships with their spouses and family members and greater resilience, including in times of crisis.⁵²

In addition to the critical benefits of education for individual girls and young women, girls’ education has been recognized as playing a “catalytic role in promoting substantive equality between men and women and as a means to improve health, economic, political, cultural and social development outcomes throughout the world.”⁵³ Girls’ education

leads to better outcomes in not only the traditional economic areas of growth and incomes but also in its positive impact in areas like reducing rates of infant mortality, maternal mortality, child marriage, and the incidence of HIV/AIDS...⁵⁴

Even after the security environment improves, girls and young women continue to experience a wide range of harmful repercussions long after the immediate attack. Attacks on education often result in devastating

consequences such as loss of education, child and forced “marriage”, early pregnancy, and stigma associated with sexual violence and children born from rape, all of which can dramatically affect female students’ futures. These harms often exacerbate and are exacerbated by pre-existing forms of gender discrimination and harmful practices that negatively affect girls and women.

Being out of school for even a short period increases the risk of child marriage and other negative coping strategies, that further diminish the chances of girls returning to school due to household responsibilities, pregnancy, parenting, or husbands, in-laws, or schools forbidding them to return. For girls who are forced to interrupt or end their education prematurely, the impact on their future earnings and job prospects is devastating. However, the impacts are much more far-reaching than economic losses: when girls are denied an education or have their education cut short, the whole community loses the many positive benefits that come with educating girls, including reduced infant and maternal mortality, healthier children and families, including a lower incidence of HIV/AIDS, and a range of improved development outcomes.⁵⁵

The loss of the transformative impact of education on future generations must be considered another component of the long-term impact of girls’ lost education.⁵⁶ OHCHR observed in 2015 that, “violations of girls’ rights to, within and through education as a result of attacks against school facilities, teachers and students – especially when these are allowed to occur repeatedly and with impunity – undermine the potential for education to act as a vehicle for individual and societal transformation.”⁵⁷

Motivations for Attacks on Female Students and Teachers

Armed parties have various reported motives for attacking girls’ schools and for targeting female students and teachers during armed conflict.⁵⁸ These motives vary depending on the context, and there may be multiple and even contradictory motives for a single attack.⁵⁹ Some armed parties are motivated by ideological or religious opposition to girls’ education, which can lead to efforts to limit girls’ school attendance after a certain age or enforce an outright prohibition, as well as attempts to restrict female students’ and female teachers’ dress and movement on the way to/from and at school.

In other contexts, non-state armed groups may consider schools, and by extension education personnel, as unwelcome representatives of government authority. These groups may not be hostile to education or to girls’ education per se but may nevertheless target women and girls in ways that are unique to them or that disproportionately affect them.

Armed forces and non-state armed groups may target educational institutions to gain a military advantage, such as to fill or replenish their ranks and view schools as convenient places to recruit children as combatants. State military and non-state armed groups may perpetrate sexual violence in and along the route to and from schools or universities as part of broader patterns of conflict-related sexual violence. The recruitment or abduction of female students and teachers can be used to “reward” combatants, such as by providing them with “wives.” Government forces and non-state armed groups sometimes forcibly recruit girls and women from schools to support their military operations, including by cooking, cleaning, and carrying supplies. And some girls are

⁴⁹ Pauline Rose, “Rape, murder, forced marriage: what girls in conflict zones get instead of education,” *The Conversation*, May 20, 2016, citing the Global Terrorism Database.

⁵⁰ UNGEI and ODI, *Mitigating Threats to Girls’ Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts: Current Practice*, October 2017, http://www.ungei.org/Girls_in_Conflict_Review-Final-Web.pdf (accessed April 12, 2019), p.5.

⁵¹ OHCHR, “Background Paper on Attacks Against Girls Seeking to Access Education,” February 2015, p. 2.

⁵² According to research conducted by Plan International, for example, adolescent girls report that education increases their resilience and capacity to cope with crises, as well as their optimism for their future. See Plan International, “Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Lake Chad Basin,” August 2018.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Gene B. Sperling, Rebecca Winthrop, and Christina Kwauk, “What Works in Girls’ Education,” (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, D.C. 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Works-in-Girls-Educationlowres.pdf> (accessed February 22), p. 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* See also “Thanks to education, global fertility could fall faster than expected,” *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/international/2019/02/02/thanks-to-education-global-fertility-could-fall-faster-than-expected> (accessed February 23, 2019).

⁵⁶ “...perhaps the greatest return from girls’ education: the belief that when a single girl who would have been denied an education receives a high-quality education, it starts a positive cycle of education and empowerment from mother to daughter, generation after generation.” Sperling, Winthrop, and Kwauk, “What Works in Girls’ Education,” p. 13.

⁵⁷ OHCHR, “Background Paper on Attacks Against Girls Seeking to Access Education,” February 2015, p. 18.

⁵⁸ For more on the motives for attacks on education generally, see GCPEA, *Education Under Attack 2014*, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_o.pdf, p. 47, and *Education Under Attack 2018*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ UNESCO, *Education Under Attack*, February 10, 2010, p. 28.



Girls assaulted by Kamuina Nsapu militia members while fleeing their primary school in Demba territory in April 2017. Kasai Central Province, Democratic Republic of Congo.

© Holly Cartner, October 2018

forcibly recruited and used in military operations, including in direct combat or as human shields. In higher education, students, academic staff, or universities can come under attack because their research is seen as being in opposition to government control or extremist dogmas. Female students can also be targeted because their political activities are perceived as falling outside the scope of appropriate behavior for women and girls in the society.

It has also been noted that attacks on girls’ education can be an indication of pervasive inequality and discrimination, as well as harmful practices and beliefs. OHCHR observed that in some contexts attacks on education may “reflect, instead, the violence experienced by girls and women in all areas of their public and private lives.”⁶⁰

THREATS AND WARNINGS AGAINST GIRLS’ EDUCATION

Opposition to girls’ education is not new. But threats against girls’ education and targeted violence against female students, teachers, and their schools, appears to have intensified over the last two decades.⁶¹ There are numerous examples of armed parties warning girls not to go to school and warning teachers and parents to close girls’ schools. In a statement in 2017, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, stated “In Afghanistan, girls’ education remains also a direct target. For instance, in April 2016, the Taliban forced 28 school principals and one teacher to attend a meeting where they demanded a change of the curriculum and stated that no girls over 11 years of age should attend school. This incident resulted in constant threats on students who lived in fear of being abducted or harmed while attending school. Similar threats against female teachers or girls were received in Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic.”⁶²

Afghanistan – Both the Taliban and the Islamic State⁶³ have opposed girls’ education and been responsible for repeated attacks on education, including particularly girls’ education.

- In January 2015, for example, an anti-government group detonated an IED in a girls’ high school. The group left a letter calling girls’ schools “brothels” and threatened further violence if the community did not stop sending girls to school.⁶⁴ The UN reported 14 incidents of threats and intimidation related to girls’ access to education in 2015, stating that nine of these “led to the closure or partial closure of 213 schools (including 94 mixed schools that were closed to girls only), affecting at least 50,683 girls.”⁶⁵
- In 2016 the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) verified “16 incidents of threats, intimidation, and harassment targeted girls’ schools.” For example, on 4 September, Anti-Government Elements ordered the principals of girls’ high schools in Alishang, Alingar and Dawlatshah districts of

⁶⁰ OHCHR, “Background Paper: On Attacks Against Girls Seeking to Access Education,” February 2015, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Report_attacks_on_girls_Feb2015.pdf (accessed March 14, 2019), p. 15.

⁶¹ Rose, “Rape, murder, forced marriage: what girls in conflict zones get instead of education,” *The Conversation*, May 20, 2016, citing the Global Terrorism Database.

⁶² Statement by Ms. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Security Council Arrria Meeting on Attacks on Schools, October 16, 2017.

⁶³ The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is officially known as the Islamic State, or by its Arabic language acronym Daesh.

⁶⁴ United Nations, “Education and Healthcare at Risk: Key Trends and Incidents Affecting Children’s Access to Healthcare and Education in Afghanistan,” April 2016, p. 16

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Laghman province to close the schools for girls in grade seven and asked the community elders to prohibit the participation of girls in higher education.⁶⁶

- Similarly, in 2018 UNAMA “verified three incidents of threats by Taliban against girls’ schools in Logar, Badghis and Badakhshan provinces. For example, on 26 August, in Baraki Barak district, Logar province, Taliban gathered girls’ school principals and ordered that female teachers of grades one to 12 and girls studying in grades seven to 12 should no longer attend school. These threats led to the suspension of classes for girls above grade six in the district and the replacement of female teachers for younger girls with male teachers.”⁶⁷
- Systematic attacks on girls’ schools continued in the first months of 2019. For example, the deputy education director for Farah Province in western Afghanistan reported being given an ultimatum by Taliban leaders to “fire all male teachers at girls’ schools” and replace them with women teachers.⁶⁸ Similarly, the UN Secretary General noted in his annual report on children and armed conflict for 2019 that “ISIL-KP [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province] expressly declared its intention to target schools, specifically girls’ schools.”⁶⁹

Pakistan – Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the so-called Pakistani Taliban, and other non-state armed groups have carried out a violent campaign against education in Pakistan, and especially against girls’ education. For example, Human Rights Watch reported that:

- In December 2015, many schools in the coastal Makran region of Balochistan received pamphlets warning parents not to send their daughters to school.⁷⁰
- In 2015, the Taliban sent letters to schools in Swat warning the school administration to close schools or face attack. The Charbagh Government Girls school was specifically told to shut down or else it would be attacked.⁷¹

Yemen – GCPEA reported in February 2019 that there is anecdotal evidence that non-state armed groups have particularly targeted girls’ education in Yemen, including:

- In November 2017, principals and several district heads of education reported increased numbers of threats against schools on social media. For example, several schools had received WhatsApp messages threatening that they would be bombed if girls continued to attend school.
- On December 8, 2017, armed men reportedly threw a hand grenade at Shams Al-Naqib school in Al-Hawta city, Lahj governorate, and demanded the segregation of boys and girls.
- Unidentified gunmen threw a hand grenade at Bilqis school for girls in Hodeida city on July 21, 2018. The attack did not cause damage to the property or casualties.⁷²

⁶⁶ UNAMA, “Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2016,” https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_annual_report_8feb_2016.pdf (accessed June 14, 2019), pp. 29-30.

⁶⁷ UNAMA, “Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 2018,” https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_protection_of_civilians_annual_report_2018_final_24_feb_2019_o.pdf (accessed August 4, 2019), p. 16.

⁶⁸ Najim Rahim and David Zucchini, “Attacks on Girls’ Schools on the Rise as Taliban Make Gains,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/world/asia/taliban-girls-schools.html> (accessed August 19, 2019).

⁶⁹ Security Council, Children and armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General, S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 23.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares,” p. 42.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares” p. 43.

⁷² GCPEA, “Safeguard Yemen’s Future: Protect Education from Attack,” February 2019, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/safeguard_yemens_future_2019.pdf (accessed August 31, 2019), p. 5.

Threats and Violence Related to Restrictions on Clothing and Curriculum

Female students and teachers have faced restrictions on their clothing and freedom of movement that have interfered with their education and have been threatened with violent consequences if they refuse to comply. Non-state armed groups have issued edicts regarding what they consider appropriate clothing for female students and teachers. A failure to comply with such prescriptions have resulted in women and girls being banned from schools and school buildings, teachers, and girls being attacked. Armed parties have also imposed limitations on the curriculum, for example by prohibiting certain subjects or requiring that the curriculum be exclusively religious in content.

Iran – “In Tehran, violent clashes broke out at the University of Tehran between pro-government activists and students protesting the requirement that women wear a hijab on campus.”⁷³

Pakistan – The UN reported that in March 2017, unidentified individuals vandalized the Oxford Public School, located in Ghizer Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, and threatened to bomb the school if female teachers did not cover themselves.⁷⁴ In February 2015, the Benazir Bhutto High School in Badami Bagh, Lahore, received a threatening letter demanding that the school administration ensure that girl students wear headscarves.⁷⁵

Mali – The UN independent expert on Mali raised concern about “the impact of activities of extremist groups that impose a strict religious ideology and have ordered the closure of many secular education institutions.”⁷⁶ Similarly, the UN reported in 2018 that girls who fail to “adhere to strict dress requirements imposed by armed groups” have been targeted for violence in schools, including sexual violence.⁷⁷

Nigeria – Boko Haram has targeted both male and female students for wearing school uniforms, but female students have also been targeted for wearing pants or wearing clothes that was considered not to adequately conceal their bodies in ways Boko Haram insurgents demanded. When Boko Haram attacked the College of Business and Management Studies in Konduga on March 11, 2014, Labraba J. described what happened:

I was wearing trousers and another girl was also wearing pants. One of the [insurgents] said, “Are you a man? You have to go.” Two of the fighters started chasing me around with a gun like they were going to shoot. I ran into one of the buildings to hide. I went in before I realized that they had already set fire there, so I had to run back out. Suddenly, I felt terrible pain in my stomach and on my skin. I had serious burns all over my body from having run into the burning dormitory.

Labraba J. had to spend over two months in the hospital and continued to need treatment long after she ran out of money to pay for hospitalization. She has visible scars from the burns she sustained. Many of Labraba’s classmates were injured during the attack.⁷⁸

Syria – The United States Department of State reported in 2015 that, in areas under Da’esh control, the group reportedly “segregated classrooms (including teachers) by gender, dismissed students for dress code violations, imposed its curriculum on teachers, and closed private schools and educational centers.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported in 2014 that, “in schools in Tweihihneh, Saraqeb, and Tariq al-Bab in Idlib governorate, ISIS

⁷³ “Education in Danger: Monthly News Brief,” May 2019, <http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Education-in-Danger-Monthly-News-Brief-May-2019-1.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2019), p. 8.

⁷⁴ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict, May 16, 2018, S/2018/465, para. 238.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Council, “Situation of human rights in Mali: Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali,” January 21, 2019, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/77> (accessed August 24, 2019), para. 55

⁷⁷ Theirworld, “10 countries where girls’ education has been under attack,” <https://theirworld.org/news/10-countries-where-girls-education-has-been-attacked> (accessed March 24, 2019).

⁷⁸ GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” October 2018, p. 21.

⁷⁹ US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015: Syria,” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/253159.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2019), p. 47.

[required] girls to abide by strict Islamic dress codes, distributing leaflets promoting Islamic religious classes, and pressuring school authorities to separate the sexes, including prohibiting male teachers from instructing girls.”⁸⁰ Zahra, a 20-year-old student in the city of Hassakeh, told Human Rights Watch that “10 of the 30 female students in her class at the Secondary School of Business stopped attending after Jabhat al-Nusra established a presence in the city in July and August 2013.” Hana, a 19-year-old from Tel Abyad, “also said that she and her female friends no longer attended class because they were afraid of [the extremist group] Jabhat al-Nusra fighters in the area.”⁸¹

ATTACKS ON GIRLS’ SCHOOLS

Threats and warnings are often followed up with violence. When girls continue to try to pursue their education despite warnings, armed parties have bombed, burned down, or otherwise physically attacked schools.

Afghanistan – Anti-government groups in Afghanistan have frequently attacked education, including the systematic targeting of girls’ schools. For example, according to UNAMA, the Taliban attacked five mixed or girls’ high schools in 2018, all of which occurred in Farah and Herat provinces. These attacks “included the burning of schools and the detonation of IEDs inside the facilities.”⁸²

Similarly, in the first quarter of 2019, UNAMA recorded four Taliban attacks on girls’ schools in Farah province, which included “setting the school buildings and equipment on fire.” UNAMA noted that, “while no casualties were recorded, the attacks spread fear among the students and their families and led to school closures, affecting education for almost 3000 girls.”⁸³

Pakistan – Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the so-called Pakistani Taliban, and other armed non-state groups have carried out a violent campaign against education in Pakistan, and especially against girls’ education. *Voice of America* reported in September 2017 that more than 1,100 girls’ schools had been destroyed in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) over the previous decade, according to government estimates.⁸⁴ Between 2013 and 2017, non-state armed groups or unknown perpetrators attacked hundreds of schools; “approximately 35 percent of these attacks affected girls’ schools.”⁸⁵ In some areas, the proportion of girls’ schools may have been higher. For example, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) reported that more than half of the schools destroyed in 2014 by the Taliban in Swat Valley, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were girls’ institutions.⁸⁶

Attacks on girls’ schools continue.

- For example, Dawn newspaper reported an incident in Balochistan province on March 23, 2017, when a government girls’ school located in Qila Abdulla was damaged in an IED attack.
- Similarly, twelve schools were set on fire or bombed in the Gilgit-Baltistan region on August 3, 2018. Local authorities indicated that the attacks were motivated by militants’ hostility toward girls’ education, at least half of which were on girls-only schools.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Syria: Extremists Restricting Women’s Rights -Harsh Rules on Dress, Work, School,” January 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/13/syria-extremists-restricting-womens-rights> (accessed August 27, 2019).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² UNAMA, “Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018,” February 2019, p.15.

⁸³ UNAMA, “Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict,” April 24, 2019, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Noor Zahid and Muhammad Ishtiaq, “Tribesmen Return to Destroyed Schools in Pakistan’s Tribal Region,” VoA, September 3, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/tribesmen-return-destroyed-schools-pakistans-tribal-region> (accessed May 5, 2019).

⁸⁵ GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2018, p. 186.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “12 schools torched overnight near Chilas,” Pakistan Today, August, 8 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/08/03/13-schools-damaged-torched-overnight-in-chilas/> (accessed June 14, 2019).



Students from Hudur Das village visit their burnt school after it was bombed overnight in the summer of 2018 by unknown militants who oppose girls’ education.

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VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE STUDENTS DURING ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS OR EN ROUTE TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Groups hostile to girls’ education have attacked female students who continue to seek an education, as well as their teachers (see discussion below). The shooting of Malala Yousafzai by a Taliban gunman in northwestern Pakistan in October 2012 is perhaps the best known of such attacks; it shocked the world and catapulted Malala and her campaign for girls’ education to international attention. Unfortunately, girls continue to suffer violent attacks by armed parties for seeking an education, both at school and while traveling to and from school.

Many students must walk long distances to reach a school, and the routes can often be dangerous. Girls are often particularly at risk of violence, including sexual violence, on their way to and from school. The times when students travel to and from school are known, and students are often walking alone in remote areas. These risks exist in peacetime, but the dangers are heightened for girls because of armed conflict. As a result, some parents choose to keep their daughters at home instead of exposing them to the risk of sexual violence.

⁸⁸ in-chilas/ (accessed June 14, 2019). Reports differed as to the number of attacked schools that were all-girl schools. See Jamil Nagri, “12 Diamer schools torched in overnight attacks,” Dawn, August 4, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1424851> (accessed August 22, 2019), which quoted a senior official stating that ten of the schools were all-girl schools. Reuters reported that of the 12 schools that were attacked, eight were girls’ and four were boys’ schools. See Jibran Ahmad, “Twelve schools bombed, burned in northern Pakistan,” Reuters, August 3, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-blast-schools/twelve-schools-bombed-burned-in-northern-pakistan-idUSKBN1K01TV> (accessed August 22, 2019).

Afghanistan – Insecurity on school routes has been identified as a key reason why children are kept out of school in Afghanistan, and girls are particularly affected. In a country study on out-of-school children in Afghanistan, UNICEF noted the “significantly different rates between insecurity being given as a reason for non-attendance of school for boys and girls.” Eight percent of boys at the primary level and 22 percent of girls identified insecurity as the reason they were out-of-school. At the secondary level, the figures were 2 percent for boys and 10 percent for girls.⁸⁸

Nigeria – Although most Boko Haram abductions of female students occurred as part of attacks on schools, some female students were also targeted on their way to or from school.⁸⁹ Some of the students interviewed by GCPEA believed that they were targeted because they were wearing a school uniform, others reported that they were asked whether they were students. For example, Sarah Y., a 19-year-old student at the Government Senior Science Secondary School in Konduga recounted that she and her classmates were abducted by armed men in 2014 while on their way home for a school holiday. She stated: “[The fighters] saw our school uniforms and said, ‘You are the students we have been looking for. We told you not to go to school, but you still go. We are fighting with the government, and by going to school you support the government.’” Sarah Y. and her three classmates were abducted and held for three days before they were released.⁹⁰

Palestine – The Israeli military’s demolition of schools and confiscation of school buildings in the West Bank has had a disproportionately negative effect on girls’ access to education. As a result of the absence of primary schools in many communities, students are sometimes forced to walk long distances and pass through a military checkpoint or areas where Israeli settlers are active to get to the closest school.⁹¹ Human Rights Watch reported that “the long distances and fear of harassment by settlers or the military lead some parents to take their children out of school, with a disproportionate impact on girls.”⁹² Similarly, the UN reported that although the school dropout rates are higher for boys than girls, “when there are security-related obstacles to accessing schools, adolescent girls are more affected.”⁹³

Somalia – In Somalia, as in many other countries, children must often walk long distances, sometimes alone, to reach their school, and most schools do not provide transportation. Girls are particularly likely to encounter sexual violence on their way to and from school. Many parents are unwilling to send their daughters to school because of the risk of sexual violence.⁹⁴ In Raga Ceel, a nine-year-old girl, going to school, was raped and badly tortured by a security personnel. The suspect escaped.⁹⁵

South Sudan – The UN reported that soldiers from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) “raped several pupils returning home from school” in September 2015 in Central Equatoria State.⁹⁶ Similarly, Human Rights

Watch reported that “three suspected opposition soldiers stopped three girls returning home from boarding school and raped them in the bush.”⁹⁷

Acid Attacks

In some countries, female students have been attacked with acid for seeking an education. The fear of such attacks often results in parents pulling their daughters out of school or fleeing to another area to attempt to avoid such violence.

Afghanistan – Human Rights Watch reported that Bina, a 35-year-old mother of 10 children, explained why her family fled to Jalalabad in 2011. “We left Bati Kot because the Taliban put acid on girls,” she said. “Seven or eight girls were injured on their way to school in the morning.” She said that the girls were teenagers, and that the attacker was on a motorcycle and had his face covered. After the attack, she said the attackers left a letter in the mosque addressed to the families of the injured girls: “They said they should not go to school, because they are too old.” After the attack, Bina said that about two-thirds of the school’s 150 girls had stopped attending.”⁹⁸

Pakistan – Human Rights Watch also reported that “In October 2012, militants intercepted a school van carrying students from the Parachinar area of Kurram agency, FATA, to the Kohat University of Science and Technology for an exam and threw acid on the faces of the female students. At least two girls sustained severe burns to their faces. The local TTP commander told CNN: ‘We will never allow the girls of this area to go and get a Western education. If and when we find any girl from Parachinar going to university for an education, we will target her [in] the same way, so that she might not be able to unveil her face before others.’”⁹⁹

Sexual Violence Against Female Students

Although there is limited data on the prevalence of sexual violence during attacks on schools, the available research suggests that non-state armed groups and government security forces commit sexual violence during attacks when students are present.¹⁰⁰ Although both male and female students may be targeted, as well as teachers, in most countries for which there is any documentation, adolescent girls and young women appear to be disproportionately affected by sexual violence, when schools are attacked, and such violence is believed to be underreported because of the associated stigma.¹⁰¹

Colombia – The UN Secretary-General, in his annual report on conflict-related sexual violence for 2017 (covering the period from January to December 2016), states that, “in Santander province, a pattern of sexual violence against schoolgirls by post-demobilization groups was documented, with a former principal and a former police inspector both facing trial for facilitating sexual slavery and forced recruitment.”¹⁰² OHCHR also reported that it has been following “the case of 10 girls who were subjected to sexual abuse by members of the post-demobilization group, Clan del Golfo, in Antioquia province. To date, just one individual has been brought to justice for the crimes.”¹⁰³ Similarly, “UNHCR reported that a 12-year-old displaced girl in Putumayo province was sexually

⁸⁸ UNICEF, “Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: Afghanistan Country Study,” April 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/2471/file/afg-report-oocs2018.pdf%20.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2019), pp. 44-5.

⁸⁹ For purposes of this report, GCPEA includes only those cases for which we believe there is a clear link to the victim’s status as a student.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 33.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch reported that the Israeli military “demolished or confiscated Palestinian school buildings or property in the West Bank at least 12 times between 2016 and 2019” and denied Palestinians the permits required to build new schools in the region. Human Rights Watch, Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Israel, 64th pre-sessional, January 28, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/submission-human-rights-watch-committee-economic-social-and-cultural-rights-israel> (accessed March 14, 2019).

⁹² Human Rights Watch, “Israel: Army Demolishing West Bank Schools: Could Amount to War Crimes,” April 25, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/25/israel-army-demolishing-west-bank-schools> (accessed March 14, 2019).

⁹³ UN Country Team Occupied Palestinian Territory, “Common Country Analysis 2016 - Leave No One Behind: A Perspective on Vulnerability and Structural Disadvantage in Palestine,” https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CCA_Report_En.pdf (accessed April 28, 2019), p. 44.

⁹⁴ GCPEA consultations, Mogadishu, November 2018.

⁹⁵ Local source, as cited in Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ID Number 5554809, <https://www.acledata.com/data/> (accessed August 14, 2019).

⁹⁶ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2016/361, April 20, 2016, <https://undocs.org/en/S/2016/361> (accessed May 24, 2019), para. 59.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Soldiers Assume We Are Rebels: Escalating Violence and Abuses, South Sudan’s Equatorias,” August 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/08/01/soldiers-assume-we-are-rebels/escalating-violence-and-abuses-south-sudans>, (accessed August 2, 2019), p. 27.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch “I Won’t be a Doctor, and One Day You’ll Be Sick,” October 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/17/i-wont-be-doctor-and-one-day-youll-be-sick/girls-access-education-afghanistan>, (accessed February 23, 2019), p. 69.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers, and Schools in Pakistan,” March 2017, pp. 35-6.

¹⁰⁰ See GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” October 2018, and GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” April 2019.

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that there is even less research investigating the prevalence of sexual violence against boys and men, and there is growing recognition that this is an issue demanding greater monitoring and documentation. See, for example, Human Rights Watch, “Men Can Experience Sexual Violence in War Too,” May 3, 2019. Therefore, although most data seem to indicate that sexual violence in most conflicts disproportionately affects girls and women, there are significant limitations to current data on this issue.

¹⁰² Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2017/249, April 15, 2017, <https://undocs.org/S/2017/249> (accessed May 24, 2019), para. 29.

Sandals are strewn in the yard of the Government Girls Science and Technical College staff quarters in Dapchi, Nigeria, on February 22, 2018, after Boko Haram abducted 111 schoolgirls.

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exploited for two years, allegedly by a member of FARC-EP. Her schoolteacher, who had reported the incident, was forced to flee the area following threats and intimidation.”¹⁰⁴

Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) – In the Kasai region, Kamuina Nsapu militia raped female students and school staff during attacks on schools or when girls were fleeing an attack. In April 2017, for example, militiamen entered Victor N.’s classroom, beat him and his male students, and captured five girls, including Victor’s younger sister. Victor stated, “Several of the militiamen started raping the five girls in the classroom, right in my presence! I was ashamed to see my little sister undergoing such a thing in my presence.”¹⁰⁵

Government soldiers, as well as armed militias, raped schoolgirls in the Kivu region. A female teacher from Rutshuru territory, which was under the control of the M23 militia at the time, told Human Rights Watch:

Sometimes, fighters come to the school to find girl students. We [teachers] can’t refuse. They [the girl students] go with [the fighters]. Often, students arrive late to school, because they get caught en route.... It would happen three to four times a month [at my school]. It would be lots of girls, maybe 10 a month or so. I can’t really say. We can’t say anything; if we do, we could be killed.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ GCPEA interview with Victor N., Luiza, October 28, 2018, reported in GCPEA, “All That I Have Lost,” p. 36.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Our School Because the Battlefield,” October 27, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/10/27/our-school-became-battlefield/using-schools-child-recruitment-and-military> (accessed August 17, 2018), p. 22.

ABDUCTION OF FEMALE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS FROM SCHOOLS OR EN ROUTE TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Armed parties have abducted female students and teachers from their schools or on school routes and, in some cases, held them in captivity for extended periods of time. Boko Haram gained international notoriety in 2014 when it abducted 276 girls from their school in the town of Chibok. Girls around the world risk abduction while traveling to and from school and while at school. Abuses following abduction often include rape, forced “marriage,” sexual slavery, forced labor, and torture and other ill-treatment. As will be discussed in a later section, female students and teachers can also be abducted for forced recruitment.

Nigeria – Abduction of civilians has been a common feature of Boko Haram’s insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. As of this writing, the whereabouts of more than 100 of the 276 “Chibok girls” who were abducted in 2014 remains unknown.¹⁰⁷ GCPEA estimates that Boko Haram has abducted approximately 600 women and girls from their schools since the conflict began. On February 19, 2018, for example, Boko Haram abducted 111 schoolgirl students (as well as two children who were visiting the staff quarters) from the Government Girls Science and Technical College in the town of Dapchi (Yobe state).¹⁰⁸ According to eyewitnesses interviewed by GCPEA, five girls were crushed to death during the abduction and transport to Boko Haram’s camp and were buried in a shallow grave along the way. Boko Haram returned all but one of the remaining Dapchi girls about a month later, on March 21, 2018, reportedly after negotiations with the Nigerian government. One girl – Leah Sharibu – was not returned, reportedly because she had refused to convert to Islam. As of this writing, she remained in captivity. The UN Secretary-General, in his annual report for 2019 on conflict-related sexual violence, reported that the schoolgirls were “subjected by members of Boko Haram to forced “marriage”, rape and physical and emotional violence.”¹⁰⁹

Niger – As the Nigerian security forces have intensified their fight against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) militants, the groups have moved into neighboring countries of the Lake Chad area and committed crimes similar to those committed in Nigeria at the peak of the conflict there, including attacks on schools and the abduction of students. For example, Urgence Diffa reported on July 4, 2019 that Boko Haram militants had abducted a schoolgirl in Boso, Diffa.¹¹⁰

South Sudan – Child protection specialists told IRIN News that most of the girls involved with armed groups in the region around Yambio were abducted, and that many of them were abducted on their way to school. These girls often experienced sexual violence and forced “marriage.”¹¹¹

Forced “Marriage,” Rape and Sexual Slavery

When schools are attacked, non-state armed groups and government forces (see also discussion of abuses against female teachers) frequently commit sexual violence, including forced “marriage” and sexual slavery, against female students and teachers. In some cases, armed parties commit sexual violence at the school during an attack. In other cases, as discussed above, they abduct girls and young women from their schools

¹⁰⁷ See “Five years on more than 100 Chibok girls still missing,” TRTWorld, April 13, 2019. VOA News, “112 Abducted Nigerian School Girls Still in Captivity Five Years Later,” March 27, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ See Government Girls Science and Technical College – Dapchi (February 19, 2018), in GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” pp. 29-31.

¹⁰⁹ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2019/280, March 29, 2019, para.119.

¹¹⁰ Insecurity Insight, “Education in Danger Monthly News Brief,” July 2019, <http://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/July-2019-Education-in-Danger-Monthly-News-Brief.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2019), p. 1.

¹¹¹ Rachel Savage and Maura Ajak, « In South Sudan, girls forced into war face gender double standards in peace,” January 4, 2019, <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2019/01/07/south-sudan-girls-child-soldiers-forced-war-face-gender-double-standards-peace> (accessed May 15, 2019).



Former teacher attacked by militia members while fleeing her school in Dimbelenge in Kasai Central Province, Republic of Congo, in November 2016.

© Holly Cartner, November 2018

and later rape and abandon them or forcibly “marry” them to a fighter or multiple fighters. Some women and girls report that armed parties held them for extended periods of time in locked rooms or houses for purposes of sexual slavery.

Congo – Kamuina Nsapu militia raped female students and school staff when they attacked schools or when girls were fleeing a school attack. Other girls were abducted and forced to marry militiamen. Yves M., primary school principal from Demba territory, described the abduction of girl students when his school was attacked in September 2016:

A group of about 30 militia came to my school. When the students saw the militia, they started running everywhere and trying to escape, but the militia members ran after them and beat them. They were armed with machetes, knives and guns. Four girls were beaten to death... The militia went to the classrooms and were selecting girls to take away. They captured 10 girls and took them to the tshiota [a ceremonial fire]. Although they said they were selecting them to be baptized, they were really selecting them to rape and to become militia “wives.” These girls were held for several months and ultimately came back to their parents very weak, and some pregnant.¹¹²

Nigeria – After abducting girls and women from their schools, Boko Haram often forced them to convert to Islam and then forcibly “married” them to fighters. Falmata I., who was 14 years old at the time of her abduction, described her experience:

I was captured and taken to the forest. Boko Haram fighters told us that if we did not follow their beliefs, they would execute us. But if we believed in their ways and married them, we could live.... Ultimately, all of us (all six who were abducted together) “married” them. But it was torture living in the forest. They kept us locked up in huts or tents and we had little food.... I was there for two years when the military rescued us. At that time, I was pregnant....¹¹³

Somalia – Al-Shabaab insurgents have kidnapped girls from schools and forced them to “marry” fighters. Human Rights Watch reported in 2012 that al-Shabaab recruited students and teachers as fighters and abducted girls for rape and forced “marriage,” including from their schools. One teacher from Mogadishu described how al-Shabaab came to his school, separated the boys from the girls, and then asked the girls to parade in front of the fighters:

They looked and picked 15- and 16-year-old girls, one was 17 years old. They took 12 girls in total. These girls were taken to be wives... After this incident all the girls over age 15 ran away or dropped out of school. One hundred fifty girls dropped out of school.¹¹⁴

ATTACKS ON FEMALE TEACHERS

When schools are attacked, female teachers may face abuses that are specific to their gender. Both female and male teachers may be targeted by armed groups opposed to education as such, or because the group is hostile toward any institution seen as representing government authority. When groups are specifically hostile to girls’ education, female and male teachers of girl students may be targeted. However, female teachers can face gender-specific types of attacks, including rape, sexual slavery, forced “marriage,” and threats or attacks related to attempts to impose restrictive dress codes or restrict their freedom of movement.

¹¹² GCPEA interview with Yves M., Kananga, November 2, 2018, cited in GCPEA, “All That I Have Lost,” p. 42.

¹¹³ GCPEA interview with Falmata I., Maiduguri, October 11, 2017, cited in GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 34.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, “No Place for Children,” February 2012, pp. 55-6.

Attacks on teachers can take many different forms. Armed groups may exert pressure on teachers and school administrators to teach a curriculum different than the government-approved one, or they may prescribe teacher conduct and dress in conformity with their religious tenets. Islamist groups, for example, may demand that only female teachers teach girl students, or may not allow female teachers to work at all. These attacks on education often result not only in violations of the teachers’ rights but prevent female students from accessing education (See Lost Education section below). Attacks on education, and especially attacks on female teachers, can result in women abandoning teaching altogether and others being less inclined to become teachers. The absence of female teachers can have serious long-term effects on girls’ education, especially in contexts in which parents will only allow their daughters to be taught by women or others insist that girls can only be taught by women teachers.

Threats and Attacks Related to Dress Codes

In addition to the discussion above regarding the imposition of conservative religious dress for female students, female teachers may also be targeted because they are viewed as having a responsibility to instill conservative religious values in their students and be a role model for female students. Teachers who resist such pressure have come under repeated attack.

Egypt – Sinai Province fighters have stopped school buses and threatened to kill or throw acid on women teachers who do not comply with prescribed dress. In March 2017, for example, Mada Masr reported that Sinai fighters “stopped a bus traveling from North Sinai’s Arish to Rafah. They announced themselves as members of the “committee for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice,” and threatened the teachers with whipping and mutilation with acid if they did not agree to follow an “Islamic dress code” and travel accompanied by a male relative.”¹¹⁵

Pakistan – An unidentified Islamist group threatened to bomb a private school in the Ghizer Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan if the female teachers did not comply with the prescribed “Islamic dress code.” The headmaster of the Oxford Public School received a handwritten letter on March 11, 2017 stating: “You are being warned. The school will be bombed if female teachers don’t observe ‘pardah’ from now on.... This is the [first and] last warning.”¹¹⁶

Somalia – Al-Shabaab has specifically targeted female teachers and enforced conservative Islamic dress. Human Rights Watch reported that a female teacher was killed for not wearing hijab in 2009 in Mogadishu. A male teacher recounted what happened to a colleague when Al-Shabaab fighters came to his school:

They picked a female teacher as she was not wearing a hijab [headscarf]. They came to her class and said, “Why don’t you have a hijab and veil?” They took her in a Toyota vehicle and her body was found ... near the mosque.¹¹⁷

As a result of the threats and violence, many female teachers were forced to abandon teaching altogether or flee the country. According to the UN Secretary-General, armed groups continued to attack schools and teachers. During 2018, the UN verified 77 attacks on schools, of which 61 were attributed to Al-Shabaab. “Incidents included killing, abduction and threats against teachers, destruction and looting.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ “No safe routes to schools,” Mada Masr, March 5, 2017. See also, “Province of Sinai militants release footage of religious policing in North Sinai,” Mada Masr, March 29, 2017.

¹¹⁶ “Group calling itself ‘Afghan Mujahideen’ threatens to bomb G-B school,” Express Tribune, March 11, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1352887/group-calling-afghan-mujahideen-threatens-bomb-g-b-school/> (accessed August 12, 2019), cited in Education Under Attack 2018, p. 188.

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “No Place for Children,” February 2012, p. 63.

¹¹⁸ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General, Children and armed conflict,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 143.

Sexual Violence, Abduction, Forced “Marriage” of Teachers

Female teachers can face the same threats and types of abuse as their female students, including abduction, rape, and forced “marriage.”

Congo – The Kamuina Nsapu militia attacked a post-secondary institute in Luiza territory in March 2017, assaulted students and teachers, and raped ten female students and a female administrator, and killed a male department head. Chantal K., a school administrator, was in her office when the militia attacked:

The militia had already tried to intimidate one of my colleagues – the head of the department. When he resisted, they beheaded him... Later the militia came to me [my office] ... They told me to take off my clothes. Three of the [militiamen] raped me.... I have not felt well since then. I have lost everything as a result of the attack They were against all the people who are working in education because they thought that all intellectuals were supporting Kabila.¹¹⁹

Myanmar – The UN Secretary-General reported that there have been attacks on school personnel by armed groups, including the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in Shan State. For example, during 2017, the UN verified that TNLA elements “raped a middle school director in Kyaukme township, Shan State.”¹²⁰

Nigeria – When Boko Haram attacked the Zanna Mobarti Primary School in Damasak in November 2014, some teachers were abducted along with several hundred children. Sadiya S., a young teacher at the school, described the three years she was in captivity:

There was just a person who claimed or marked a specific woman for himself. It is very painful to talk about. I had three different husbands.... Even now, I cannot forget the smell, the odor, the horror of them coming to rape me. If you tried to resist – to say no – they would just put a gun to your head and threaten to shoot you. And then they would rape you anyway. It was sexual slavery.¹²¹

Philippines – Gunmen suspected of being members of the Islamist armed group Abu Sayyaf abducted a female teacher on June 20, 2016, at Kanlagay Elementary School in Kalingalan Caluang, Sulu province, later forcing her to “marry” one of her abductors.¹²² The teacher was later rescued by Philippine security forces.

RECRUITMENT AND USE OF FEMALE STUDENTS AND ABUSES WHILE WITH MILITIA

The vast majority of girls and women who are abducted from schools (or on school routes) appear to be abducted for rape, sexual slavery, and forced “marriage.” As discussed above, there are examples of armed parties engaging in recruitment efforts with girl and boy students, including exerting pressure on students to join and support a group’s armed struggle, but then using girls exclusively or primarily for sexual purposes after joining. As stated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict:

Girls are also recruited and used by armed forces and groups. They have vulnerabilities unique to their gender and place in society and suffer specific consequences including, but not limited to, rape and sexual violence, pregnancy and pregnancy-related complications, stigma and rejection by families and

¹¹⁹ GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” April 2019, p. 35.

¹²⁰ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General, Children and armed conflict,” S/2018/465, May 16, 2018, para. 132.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²² Education Under Attack 2018, p. 200, citing “Abducted teacher forced to marry her abductor rescued by military in Sulu,” Philippines Now, July 11, 2016.

communities.¹²³

However, armed parties also forcibly recruit girls and women from schools to support their military operations, including by cooking, cleaning, and carrying supplies. And some girls are forcibly recruited and used in military operations, including direct combat.¹²⁴

Congo – In the Kasai region of the Congo, young girls were specifically recruited by Kamuina Nsapu because they were believed to be able to magically stop bullets by rustling their skirts. They were placed at the front of the militia units going into battle as human shields, often completely unarmed or armed only with a “magical” weapon such as a broom or kitchen utensil. Many are believed to have died because of their position in the front lines. According to MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping force in the Congo, “89 percent of girls recruited by Kamuina Nsapu were involved in armed clashes,” which is much higher than in most conflicts, including those in the eastern provinces of the Congo.¹²⁵

Lucia N. told GCPEA about her experience after being recruited:

The militia leaders gave us girls a broom, which was considered magic. I was given a wooden [kitchen utensil] that was supposed to be a magic gun that the soldiers could not defeat.... After that, I went with them wherever they went and participated in several battles. I later realized that we would not be able to defeat soldiers with the magic. They were killing us in large numbers.¹²⁶

Nigeria – Although some women and girls have reported that Boko Haram forced them to carry supplies or to lure soldiers or pro-government vigilantes into an ambush, the women and girls interviewed by GCPEA reported that Boko Haram did not typically force females to participate in military operations, and none of them reported that they had been forced to participate in such operations.¹²⁷ However, other research has suggested that, in some cases, Boko Haram does train women and girls, including some who have been abducted, as fighters.¹²⁸

Boko Haram has, however, increasingly used women and children as suicide bombers in northeastern Nigeria. Experts believe that many of these children had been abducted previously, including from schools. The first female suicide bomber was documented in 2014, and the number of bombers who are female and/or children has escalated since that time. The UN reported that during 2017, “115 children – 38 boys and 77 girls – had been used as human bombs. That number was six times higher than in 2016.”¹²⁹ The use of female suicide bombers appears to be growing.¹³⁰ In 2018, the UN reported that “Boko Haram continued to recruit children and used 48 (38) girls for the purpose of bearing and detonating improvised explosive devices in north-east Nigeria, 30 in Cameroon, 24 in Chad, and 10 in the Niger.”¹³¹

¹²³ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, “Questions and Answers on the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers,” <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/questions-and-answers-on-the-recruitment-and-use-of-child-soldiers/> (accessed August 4, 2019).

¹²⁴ Although some women may choose to join armed parties for a variety of reasons, this section deals only with those female students or teachers who were forcibly recruited. To the extent that those being recruited are under the age of 18, they are considered for purposes of this report to be forcibly recruited and to be used in violation of international law. For those children who are under the age of 15, their recruitment and use is a war crime. (See Annex I, Legal Obligations Under International Law)

¹²⁵ MONUSCO, “Our Strength Is in Our Youth: Child Recruitment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2014-2017,” February 2019, [Kamuina Nsapu Chapter, pre-publication pagination], p. 11.

¹²⁶ GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 33.

¹²⁷ GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 43.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Amnesty International report, “Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter and Kill,” April 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1360/2015/en/>, p. 72.

¹²⁹ UNOG, Regular Press Briefing, “Attack against primary school in Nigeria,” December 1, 2017, [https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/\(httpNewsByYear_en\)/F38A0371E488C9F3C12581E9005D3069?OpenDocument](https://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/(httpNewsByYear_en)/F38A0371E488C9F3C12581E9005D3069?OpenDocument) (accessed April 9, 2018).

¹³⁰ GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” pp. 44-5.

¹³¹ Security Council, Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict, S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 207.

Somalia – Al-Shabaab has forcibly recruited girls, as well as boys, from schools. While some may have been convinced to join or joined because of promises of financial reward, many joined under duress, including threats of violence. Human Rights Watch reported, for example, that a girl who refused to join al-Shabaab was shot in front of her classmates. In another incident, 12 girls were forcibly taken, and 150 females dropped out of school.¹³²

Yemen – The UN reported “large-scale child recruitment” from schools, as well as orphanages and communities. The UN reported in 2019 that it had verified “the recruitment of 16 girls between the ages of 15 and 17 by the Houthis in Sa’dah. The girls were used to encourage male members of their families to join the Houthis and to mobilize other women and girls to do the same. Some were also trained in the use of weapons.”¹³³ The UN also reported “four schools that were used by the Houthis for recruiting and mobilizing girls.”¹³⁴

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Attacks on Female Academics and Education Staff/ Higher Education Students

Higher education institutions are often targeted for many of the same reasons as primary and elementary schools. Similarly, female students and academics in higher education institutions often face the same types of abuse and violence, including sexual violence, that occur in secondary and primary schools. To the extent that the types of violence are the same as for secondary school students, these examples are included in the sections above.

There are, however, sometime different motives for attacks on higher education. GCPEA has previously stated that:

Many attacks on higher education are linked to government attempts to prevent the growth of opposition movements; restrict political protests, including those related to education policy; stop anti-government protests on campus; quell education trade union activity; or curtail the freedom of lecturers and researchers to explore or discuss sensitive subjects or alternative views to government policy. As with violence against school students and teachers, attacks on higher education can also involve sectarian bias and targeting of ethnic groups.¹³⁵

Women have been targeted because they were perceived as leaders in university-initiated protest movements. In other cases, female and male protesters were targeted, but female students faced gender-specific types of violence, including sexual violence. It should be noted that male students also faced sexual violence. Although sexual violence appears to be used disproportionately against female students, there is limited data to assess these patterns, and there appear to be significant differences depending on the conflict and cultural context.

India – Scholars at Risk Network reported that police allegedly wounded several students, mostly female, at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) on September 23, 2017, as they tried to enter the residence of the university’s vice chancellor during a protest against the alleged sexual harassment of one of their classmates. According to the students, police used lathis (a kind of marital arts stick) against the protesters, pulled their hair, and dragged them away. Varanasi police reportedly charged some 1,200 BHU students, mostly female, with arson and other crimes. The vice chancellor was accused of mishandling the event and placed on indefinite leave, the head of

¹³² Theirworld, “10 countries where girls’ education has been under attack.”

¹³³ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, paras. 188-189.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 194.

¹³⁵ GCPEA, Education Under Attack 2014, p. 21.

campus security resigned, seven women were appointed as security guards, and the National Commission for Women initiated an investigation.¹³⁶

Venezuela – Human Rights Watch reported that Bolivarian National Police (Policía Nacional Bolivariana, PNB) personnel entered the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador in Aragua state on July 2, 2017. PNB personnel “beat students, and took them away, according to lawyers who later defended the detainees. The lawyers say that according to the students, while inside an armored vehicle, an agent placed a female student’s head close to his genitals, touched her breasts, and told her, “This is what you like.” While in detention agents allegedly denied [the students] food, beat them on the head, and insulted them. Four of the students reportedly got sick with malaria in prison and did not receive adequate treatment.”¹³⁷

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

The presence of armed parties, whether an armed non-state group or a government force, in and around schools, exposes students and teachers to increased risks. When schools and universities are used for military purposes, the civilian status of the school may be jeopardized, increasing the risk of retaliatory attacks. There is a heightened risk to students and teachers, even when soldiers are present to protect them from attack.

The presence of armed forces or groups in or near schools and the risk of retaliatory attacks by opposing parties increases the likelihood that children’s education will be disrupted. There is also a heightened risk that school buildings and infrastructure will be damaged or destroyed, that teaching and other supplies will be looted, and that both students and teaching staff will be too afraid to go to the school. The presence of armed parties in or near schools also increases the risk that students will be exposed to a range of abuse, including violence and recruitment. It may also present particular risks for female students and teachers including sexual harassment and sexual violence. As a result, parents may feel compelled to pull their children out of school and are particularly likely to pull their daughters out of school as a preventive measure when armed forces are in or near schools. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has stated:

[S]tudents attending classes in schools under occupation by troops or armed forces may be exposed to physical or sexual abuse, with girls at greater risk than boys. The presence of armed men often discourages families from sending girls to school for fear that they will become victims of sexual violence or be subjected to sexual harassment. They therefore often marry off their daughters at an early age, believing that it may afford them protection. Overall, attacks on education and use of schools and universities by the military or armed groups have a disproportionate or discriminatory impact upon girls and women.¹³⁸

Congo – During the conflict in the Kasai region, the Kamuina Nsapu militia used schools for recruitment purposes, affecting the well-being of many children and having specific repercussions for girl students (see above). The Congolese Army was also responsible for the military use of schools, often occurring in the aftermath of a school attack. In 10 of the 38 verified cases where schools were attacked by government security forces, the forces occupied the school for periods ranging from one to six months, which led to the disruption of students’

education and damage to the school infrastructure.¹³⁹ Some teachers also reported that parents were particularly reluctant to send their daughters to schools where security forces were nearby.

In Nyongera, North Kivu province, a girl told Human Rights Watch that, during the time that the militia group M23 controlled the area [between April 2012 and November 2013]:

There was a military barrier right beside our school.... Some fighters stood at the gate. If they saw you coming into school, one would stop you and tell you to join him at recess [and threaten that if you did not] you will have trouble passing that way when you return at the end of the day. Under these conditions, many of my friends dropped out [of school].¹⁴⁰

Armed forces and non-state armed groups have also reportedly used schools to detain people, including holding and raping women there.

Iraq – The UN reported in January 2017 that Islamic State had used schools for military purposes including to house abducted Yazidi women until they could be sold off. According to the UN, “ISIL allegedly brought an unspecified number of Yazidi women to Tall Afar in November [2016], placed them in a school and sold some of them to its fighters.¹⁴¹ While the UN reported that women and girls who had been held in sexual slavery continued to be released during 2018, “the Kurdistan Regional Government estimates that there are... 1,427 women and girls” still missing.¹⁴²

Myanmar – Myanmar armed forces (the Tatmadaw) have used schools in Rakhine State for a variety of military purposes, including to detain ethnic Rohingya during the October 2016 violence in northern Rakhine State. Women and girls reported being taken to schools, among other places, and being raped there by security forces. For example, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in 2017 that it had documented numerous rapes in a number of contexts, including that “women and girls would be rounded up by military and several of them would be taken to nearby schools, mosques, houses or the forest/jungle to be gang raped.”¹⁴³ Victims reported that they were often left in public places without clothes, including in schools. OHCHR reported that “In one case in which several girls were raped in a school, one of the victims reported that the military took photos of the naked victims with their mobiles before raping them.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported that “Azara Younus, 28 years, from Kyein Chaung village, known locally as Boli Bazar, in Maungdaw Township, was dragged to a school toilet by a soldier after a group of soldiers had beaten her. The single soldier raped her, she said, ‘on the filthy water on the floor.’”¹⁴⁵

Nigeria – According to Amnesty International, Nigerian soldiers and members of the pro-government militia known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) have reportedly raped and sexually exploited girls and women being housed in a secondary school camp complex in the town of Bama. The school complex has been used since 2017 to house those displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram, most of whom were previously housed in the Bama Hospital camp. Women and girls were coerced by soldiers and CJTF members to become “girlfriends”; those who refused were denied access to food and other items needed for survival.¹⁴⁶ Amnesty International reported that:

¹³⁹ GCPEA, “All That I Have Lost,” p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Our School Became the Battlefield, October 27, 2015, p. 23.

¹⁴¹ Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2017/75, January 26, 2017, http://www.uniraq.org/images/SGReports/S201775_ENG.pdf, para. 41.

¹⁴² Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence,” S/2019/280, para. 50.

¹⁴³ OHCHR, Report of OHCHR mission to Bangladesh: Interviews with Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar since 9 October 2016 (Geneva: OHCHR, February 3, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/MM/FlashReport3Feb2017.pdf>, pp. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, “‘All of My Body Was Pain’: Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma,” November 16, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/16/all-my-body-was-pain/sexual-violence-against-rohingya-women-and-girls-burma> (accessed August 27, 2019), p. 16.

¹⁴⁶ Amnesty International, “‘They Betrayed Us’: Women Who Survived Boko Haram Raped, Starved, and Detained in Nigeria,” May 24, 2018, AFR 44/8415/2018 <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR4484152018ENGLISH.PDF> (accessed September 22, 2019), p. 11.

¹³⁶ Scholars at Risk Network, Academic Freedom Monitor, Banaras Hindu University, September 23, 2017, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2017-09-23-banaras-hindu-university/> (accessed August 18, 2019).

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Crackdown on Dissent Brutality, Torture, and Political Persecution in Venezuela,” November 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/29/crackdown-dissent/brutality-torture-and-political-persecution-venezuela>, (accessed October 24, 2019), p. 41.

¹³⁸ CEDAW, “General recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education,” CEDAW/C/GC/36, November 27, 2017, <https://undocs.org/CEDAW/C/GC/36> (accessed April 16, 2019), para. 48.

Women interviewed have also described how soldiers and Civilian JTF created an organized system to inflict sexual violence in Bama Hospital and Secondary School camps. The Civilian JTF members select women in the camp and take them to soldiers for sex. Four women said that the layout of Bama Secondary School camp was designed to make sexual exploitation easier, by separating young women from their in-laws and other people in the camp. Women have said that if they complain, they risk being called a “Boko Haram wife” and facing reprisals.¹⁴⁷

Although the situation in the area has improved since internally displaced persons were transferred to the school, as of March 2018, Amnesty International was continuing to receive reports that, the Civilian JTF members choose women in Bama Secondary School camp to take to the military. Women told the Amnesty International delegate who visited Bama Secondary School camp in March 2018 that the Civilian JTF will select as many as 15 or 20 women and girls inside the camp and take them in the evenings to the soldiers in the barracks or the town.¹⁴⁸

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF ATTACKS ON EDUCATION AND MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS

In addition to the abuses committed against female students and teachers as an immediate result of an attack on schools or following abduction or recruitment from schools, the suffering and impact does not end there. Instead, girls and young women continue to experience a wide range of harmful repercussions long after the immediate attack and the impact for girls, and especially adolescent girls, can be disproportionate.

Lost Education

One of the most devastating long-term impacts for girls is often the loss of education. As discussed throughout this paper, girls’ access to education is severely hampered by deteriorating security. As the security situation worsens in and around schools, parents often pull their children out of school as a precautionary measure. During research interviews, GCPEA heard repeatedly from parents, teachers, and students that parents are often more worried about the safety of their daughters, especially due to increased risks of sexual violence, and generally more likely to keep their daughters out of school due to insecurity.

Nigeria – Many female students told GCPEA that they had been forced to suspend or leave their education because of the attacks they had survived in northeastern Nigeria. In some cases, the girls’ parents decided that they should not continue their education, in other cases the girls themselves were too afraid to continue. For example, Hauwa M., a 16-year-old student when her school was attacked in in 2014, reported:

[After the attack], I went home. I was too afraid and decided not to go back. I told my parents I would never go back to school. They were also too afraid.... Before [the attack], I was so passionate to study and achieve my dream [of being a lawyer]. But now, this experience completely demoralized me...¹⁴⁹

Similarly, many of the girls who were abducted from their school in Dapchi told GCPEA that they were too afraid to return to school. For example, Habiba M., a 15-year-old student at the time of the abduction in February 2018, stressed:

I will never go back to school because Boko Haram warned us that if we return to school and they catch us, we will never come out. I prefer to continue with my Islamic school at home where it is safe and close to my family. I don’t think Dapchi School is safe to go to again.¹⁵⁰

A single attack on education can have consequences that go far beyond the impact on those directly affected by the attack; many girls and young women in Nigeria told GCPEA that they, or their parents, were too afraid for them to continue their studies after learning about the experiences of others, particularly the Chibok abductions. This was sometimes the case even when there had been no direct attacks on schools in their immediate vicinity.

As noted above, there is also an increased risk of sexual harassment and sexual violence as a result of the presence of armed men in and near schools. Numerous international bodies have recognized that, because of such a military presence, parents often decide to withdraw their daughters from school or the girls themselves decide not to continue to attend school. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has repeatedly expressed concern about the negative impact of military use of schools on the ability of girls to access education. For example, in 2014, CEDAW pointed to reports that military use of schools in India contributed to higher dropout rates among girl students. The Committee expressed concern that “girls are subjected to sexual harassment and violence, including in conflict-affected regions where the reported occupations of schools by the security forces contribute to girls dropping out of school.”¹⁵¹

Pakistan – An education activist in the Swat Valley described the military’s presence in schools and its impact on students, including girls. Babar Khan, an education activist in Swat told Human Rights Watch that:

The army interferes in the functioning of schools and often enters unannounced for the purposes of conducting a search or reviewing security measures. This is a cause of constant stress for the students. This is also additionally problematic in a conservative society such as Swat, particularly barging into girls’ schools with guns, sometimes harassing female teachers... Some parents are reluctant to send girls to schools since they fear that the military officers can come and harass their daughters. There have been at least eight cases of girls who have either run away with, or were abducted by, army officers.¹⁵²

Even after a conflict subsides and the security situation improves, children and their parents are often too afraid for their children to return to school. Although it was beyond the scope of this report to do a comprehensive study of post-conflict school attendance rates, anecdotal evidence suggests that the dropout rate is often higher for girls.

Congo – At the time of GCPEA’s research in the Kasai Central region of the Congo in fall 2018, there was little concrete data on the numbers of children who were still out of school when the 2017-2018 school year had started. However, GCPEA’s interviews with many school principals in the region indicated that when schools reopened in September 2017, there were fewer students than had been registered the previous year and that this was particularly true for girls. By September 2018—the start of the 2018-2019 school year—a higher number of students had returned to school, but the number of girls who were out of school appeared to remain higher than that of boys.¹⁵³

Pakistan – Human Rights Watch reported, for example, that even after most of the damaged schools had been rebuilt in the Swat region, there was “a disturbingly high dropout rate for children who were enrolled before the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴⁹ GCPEA interview with Hauwa M., Damaturu, February 7, 2018, GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 46.

¹⁵⁰ GCPEA interview with Habiba M., Dapchi, March 28, 2018, GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 46.

¹⁵¹ CEDAW, “Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of India,” CEDAW/C/IND/CO/4-5, July 24, 2014 (accessed August 18, 2019), para. 26.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares,” p. 47.

¹⁵³ See GCPEA, “All That I Have Lost,” pp. 42-45.

conflict started. At least 40 percent of male students and 80 percent of female students did not return to school even 11 months after the Pakistan Army had displaced the Taliban control of the area.”¹⁵⁴

Yemen – While there has been a significant gender gap in school attendance for girls in Yemen, with “pre-conflict enrollment rates for girls at 62 percent compared to 72 percent for boys of primary age,” according to Save the Children:

An assessment conducted in Aden Governorate in March 2016 suggests that the gap between girls and boys attending school has widened further, at least in that governorate, with 76 girls to every 100 boys in the sampled schools, compared to 92 per 100 pre-conflict. According to the assessment, conflict-related insecurity has compounded pre-existing social, cultural and economic deterrents to sending girls to school.¹⁵⁵

Conflict-exacerbated poverty also affects parents’ ability to pay for school fees for both boys and girls and is often the single greatest obstacle to continuing or returning to school once the security situation improves. It takes scarce resources and significant time to recover from the damage and destruction of school infrastructure and lost learning materials, even after a conflict has ended. However, when parents are not able to pay for all their children to attend school, they often give priority to their sons’ education.

Congo – Parents, teachers, and students repeatedly reported that when a family could not afford to send all children back to school, parents always give priority to their sons’ education over their daughters’. A local representative for education in Kasai Central province expressed a view shared by many of those interviewed by GCPEA:

There are many reasons that girls are out of school since the conflict.... When parents are not able to afford to pay for their children, they prefer their sons because they are asking themselves who will take care of me in my old age. Their daughters will go to their husband’s family when they marry, but it will be their sons who take care of them, so they will benefit from investing in their sons more than their daughters.¹⁵⁶

Education is essential for girls’ development and personal fulfillment. As noted earlier, education provides girls with the tools necessary to access other human rights; it helps girls promote their own best interests, including in their families and communities. Girls who are forced to interrupt or end their education prematurely suffer profound and long-term consequences, including the loss of a range of opportunities such as personal and economic independence, greater confidence in their relationships with their spouses and family members and greater resilience, including in times of crisis.

Girls’ education also

leads to better outcomes in not only the traditional economic areas of growth and incomes but also in its positive impact in areas like reducing rates of infant mortality, maternal mortality, child marriage, and the incidence of HIV/AIDS...¹⁵⁷

In fact, the loss of the transformative impact of education on future generations must be considered another component of the long-term impact of girls’ lost education.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers, and Schools in Pakistan,” March 2017, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/pakistan0317_web_o.pdf (accessed May 4, 2019), p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ Save the Children, “Futures on the Line, Yemen’s Children Missing an Education,” August 9, 2016, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/10058/pdf/20160523_yemen_education_brief_final_designed_version.pdf (accessed September 12, 2019), p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ GCPEA interview with local representative for education, Luiza, November 2, 2018, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 45.

¹⁵⁷ Sperling, Winthrop, and Kwauk, “What Works in Girls’ Education,” p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ “...perhaps the greatest return from girls’ education: the belief that when a single girl who would have been denied an education receives a high-quality education, it starts a positive cycle of education and empowerment from mother to daughter, generation after generation.” Sperling, Winthrop, and Kwauk, “What Works in Girls’ Education,” p. 13.

Child Marriage and Early Pregnancy

There are numerous risks for teenage girls who are not in school, including child and forced “marriage”, early pregnancy, and lost opportunities for employment and economic independence. CEDAW has recognized that “when girls are not in school, they are more likely to be forced to marry.”¹⁵⁹ Scholars and activists have written extensively about the link between insecurity and child marriage, including how parents sometimes resort to child marriage in times of insecurity out of desperation or as a perceived form of protection. According to the organization Girls, Not Brides:

Many parents marry their daughters young because they feel it is in her best interest, often to ensure her safety in areas where girls are at high risk of harassment and physical or sexual assault....Child marriage can increase in humanitarian crises, such as in conflict or after a natural disaster. When families face even greater hardship, they may see child marriage as a coping mechanism in the face of poverty and violence.¹⁶⁰

Attacks on schools that, as discussed above, result in girls leaving or being taken out of school further exacerbate the tendency to marry girls at an early age. Research consistently finds that being out of school, even for relatively short periods, greatly increases the risk of child marriage for girls.¹⁶¹ Teachers and principals interviewed by GCPEA in Congo and Nigeria reported that girls who had previously attended school were pulled out and married, sometimes at a very young age, in response to growing insecurity.

Nigeria – While there is little concrete data to confirm an increase in the prevalence of child marriage in Nigeria as a result of the conflict, INGO representatives and Nigerian women’s rights activists expressed the view that early and child marriage have increased in the northeast as a result of insecurity. Similarly, teachers and principals interviewed by GCPEA reported that many female students did not return to school after attacks, and many parents refused to send their daughters back to school because of fear of the security situation. They said that many of their former students had subsequently faced early and forced “marriage”. For example, Fadimatu U., a principal of a senior secondary school in Nigeria, noted:

Some girls were forced to get married. Their parents were worried what might happen if their girls were not in school. Marriage is considered a form of protection.¹⁶²

Similarly, Hamidah M., principal of secondary school from Monguno, Nigeria, pointed out:

For girls who were left at home, many were forced by their parents to marry. If they were married, it was sometimes the only security they had.¹⁶³

Congo – The UN Team of International Experts on the situation in the Kasais reported that there had been an increase in child marriages in the region as a result of the conflict.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, virtually all of the principals interviewed by GCPEA reported that there had been an increase in child marriages of girl students from their schools. What is more, interviewees stressed that, as a result of the widespread sexual violence during the conflict, parents were afraid that their daughters would never be able to find a husband if they were victims of rape, so

¹⁵⁹ CEDAW, “General recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education,” CEDAW/C/GC/36, November 27, 2017, para. 52.

¹⁶⁰ Girls Not Brides, “Why Does Child Marriage Happen?” https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/why-does-it-happen/#_ftn5 (accessed August 9, 2019). See also, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, *Fragile States, Fragile Lives: Child Marriage Amid Disaster and Conflict* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), <http://www.cfr.org/global/fragile-states-fragile-lives/p33093>; Anju Malhotra et al, *Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows* (Washington, International Center for Research on Women, 2011), <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/Solutions-to-EndChild-Marriage.pdf>; and CARE International, *Women and girls in emergencies*, March 2018.

¹⁶¹ See UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young*, 2012, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>.

¹⁶² GCPEA interview with Fadimatu U., Maiduguri, October 12, 2017, in GCPEA, “You Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 48.

¹⁶³ GCPEA interview with Hamidah M., Maiduguri, October 12, 2017, in GCPEA, “You Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 48.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Council, “Detailed Report of the Team of International Experts on the situation in the Kasais (Rapport détaillé de l’Equipe d’experts internationaux sur la situation au Kasai),” A/HRC/38/CRP.1, June 29, 2018, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1637440?ln=en> (accessed September 8, 2018), para. 416.

they were opting for child marriage as a perceived form of protection for their daughters. For example, Yves M., a primary school principal from Demba territory, Congo, observed:

Four girls who were 14-15 years old were married off during the conflict. We had not had such early marriages in my school before the conflict. But afterwards, parents saw that girls had been raped, and they would agree to have their daughters married as soon as possible.¹⁶⁵

Although parents may consider child marriage as a protection mechanism, especially during periods of insecurity, child marriage often exposes the girl to a number of increased risks. A girl who marries at an early age is often not mentally or emotionally prepared to negotiate for safer sex or withstand the pressures from her husband and other family members to become pregnant soon after the marriage. Child marriage frequently leads to early and unprotected sex, early pregnancy, and related reproductive health complications. UNFPA in Nigeria has stated that “the health consequences of early marriage among adolescents include, early childbearing; increased risk of STIs and HIV; high infant and maternal mortality and morbidity, prolonged and obstructed labor which may result in fistula and the corresponding consequences of social exclusion.”¹⁶⁶

Similarly, Dr. Judith Ann Walker, director of the development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) in Kano, Nigeria, and an expert on child marriage, has observed that:

As 90% of pregnancies in the developing world happen within marriages, child marriage contributes to high rates of pregnancy and pregnancy-related risks in young girls. In situations of child marriage, girls tend to become pregnant very soon after marriage, often before they are physically or mentally ready, leading to earlier ages at first birth and higher total fertility rates.... Young girls are more likely to experience difficult pregnancies and complications of deliveries. The risk of maternal mortality is doubled in cases where the mother is below 20 and increases 5-7 times when the mother is below 14. [Footnotes omitted].¹⁶⁷

Stigma, Social Exclusion, and Long-term Impact on Mental Health

Women and girls who are survivors of abduction, recruitment, and sexual violence frequently suffer from emotional distress and trauma related to their experiences during the conflict and the violence they witnessed and, in some circumstances, carried out. For survivors of violence and abuse, there is long-term impact to both their physical and psychological health. For many of those interviewed by GCPEA, the lingering effects of the traumatic experiences were still visible even years after the violence. Even girls and young women who have overcome multiple obstacles to return to school after an attack often suffer stress and trauma that negatively affect their learning outcomes. Many continue to feel insecure in school and on school routes long after the attack.¹⁶⁸

Nigeria – Many students and some of the teachers who survived attacks on their schools described a range of symptoms, such as recurring nightmares, anxiety, being easily frightened, an inability to focus and other signs commonly associated with trauma. They reported that mental health consequences related to the conflict impedes their ability to move on with their lives and has ongoing impact on their education. Although the security situation has improved in northeastern Nigeria, suicide bombings and ongoing threats continue to make it difficult for students to recover since they are denied the normalcy provided by attending school in a safe

environment. As noted above, some have decided not to return to school. Even those who returned to school at some point after the attack reported that it was difficult for them to concentrate on their schoolwork. Many have recurring flashbacks; some frighten easily. Several cried during their interview with GCPEA.

Hamidah I. who is currently a student at the University of Maiduguri, in Nigeria, stated:

The security situation has really had an effect on me. I cannot help but keep thinking about the people coming to kill me when I am writing my exams. It is really hard to concentrate.¹⁶⁹

Habiba Y., who was a 14-year-old student when her school was attacked in 2014, told GCPEA what she saw when she left her dormitory after the attack:

I saw corpses littered all around. I went home, and I never went back to school.... The thoughts and images come back to me over and over again. Many times, I feel depressed and sad. As we are sitting here talking, I am ok, but those images can come up at any time and then I remember again all I saw that night.¹⁷⁰

For women and girls who have experienced abduction, recruitment, and rape, their trauma is often compounded by the stigma and social exclusion they suffer as victims of sexual violence, as well as their perceived association with militia groups. For many, it is this ridicule and rejection by family and friends that is most painful. Child Soldiers International (CSI) conducted research in 2017 with girls who were formerly members of non-state armed groups in the eastern provinces of Congo, many of whom had been sexually abused.¹⁷¹ According to CSI, those who had faced sexual abuse were often ostracized by their family and community when they returned home. CSI reported:

Social exclusion and stigmatization is far more prevalent among girls. It is linked to a perceived “loss of social value” after having had sexual relations outside marriage. Their suffering is often misunderstood or completely overlooked, and their most basic psychosocial and emotional needs are woefully unaddressed.¹⁷²

Such stigma can be a significant obstacle for girls who would wish to return to school. Many survivors of sexual violence who were interviewed by GCPEA reported being too embarrassed or ashamed to go back to school; others could not face the reactions of their classmates and others.

Congo – In the Kasai region, for example, women and girls who were raped during the conflict reported that they rarely return to school because of the shame they feel. Those who attempt to go back to school often face terrible bullying and social exclusion. Joséphine N., a 19-year-old student from Dimbelenge, was raped by Kamuina Nsapu militiamen and later threatened with rape by government army soldiers. Joséphine told GCPEA that she wanted to finish secondary school (she was in the last year), but cried as she spoke about being in school:

I went back to school in September 2017, but classmates called me names and said I was a ‘wife of the militia.’ They laugh at me and make fun of me, even though they do not know how much I have suffered.¹⁷³

François L., a high school teacher from Luiza territory, also described how rape survivors are treated in his school:

Among our students, those who were raped find it difficult to return to school. We observed that one girl student who was raped was too ashamed to continue. And I saw another girl who raised her hand to answer a question in class. Her classmates laughed at her and said she had been raped. The next

¹⁶⁵ GCPEA interview with Yves M., Kananga, November 2, 2018, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” pp. 47-48.

¹⁶⁶ UNFPA, “Adolescent Girl Initiative in Northern Nigeria,” 2016, <http://nigeria.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Adolescent%20Girl%20Initiative%20in%20Northern%20Nigeria.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Judith-Ann Walker, with Sarah Mukisa, Yahaya Hashim and Hadiza Ismail, Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A Scan of Trends, Interventions, What Works, Best Practices, and the Way Forward (Ford Foundation, September 2013), https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Ford-Foundation-CM-West-Africa-2013_09.pdf (accessed October 14, 2017), p. 36.

¹⁶⁸ Plan International, “Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Lake Chad Basin,” August 2018.

¹⁶⁹ GCPEA interview with Hamidah I., Maiduguri, February 8, 2018, in GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 51.

¹⁷⁰ GCPEA interview with Habiba Y., Damaturu, February 7, 2018, in GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” p. 51.

¹⁷¹ Child Soldiers International, “DR Congo: Improving practices for the reintegration of girl soldiers,” June 19, 2017, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e57e9cb2-cd70-4dc2-8681-e29bc6f3622b> (accessed August 12, 2018).

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 27.

¹⁷³ GCPEA interview with Joséphine N., Kananga, November 1, 2018, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 50.

day she did not come back to school.¹⁷⁴

Similarly, in its research in the eastern provinces of Congo, Human Rights Watch found that girls in schools were targeted by both government soldiers and non-state armed groups for abduction and sexual violence, and that “after being raped, girls often drop out of school because of the associated stigma, medical consequences.”¹⁷⁵

Camille, who was 16 when Human Rights Watch interviewed her, said she had dropped out of secondary school in the Lukweti area without finishing her exams after she was raped by an army soldier and became pregnant. “They got us when we were fleeing but still in the school enclosure,” she told Human Rights Watch. “It was government soldiers who took us. They took us two girls and raped us.”¹⁷⁶

Rejection by Husbands and Other Family Members

Girls and young women who have been victims of sexual violence are sometimes rejected by their families, including husbands or partners, who view their suffering as having brought shame to the family. Many will not be able to marry and will struggle to care for themselves and their children. The UN Secretary-General, in his annual report on conflict-related sexual violence for 2019, stated:

Mothers of children born of wartime rape bear the burden of being ostracized by their own community. In addition to economic difficulties, they are often stigmatized by members of their family and community, who view them as “affiliates of the enemy.” Survivors and their children often face high levels of stigma, and the children can be at risk of abuse, abandonment, and marginalization.¹⁷⁷

Congo – Young women who were raped during attacks at their school in the Kasai region told GCPEA that their spouse or fiancé rejected and abandoned them because of the rape. For example, Chantal K., who was raped by Kamuina Nsapu militiamen at the institute where she worked, stated: “My husband left me because of the rape... Although I was two months pregnant with my daughter (my husband’s child) when I was raped, my husband has never come to see her.... I am so upset about my future.”¹⁷⁸

Nigeria – Women and girls who were abducted and held in captivity by Boko Haram often face rejection by their communities and even their families, no matter how clear it was that they were taken involuntarily. When they return with babies whose fathers are Boko Haram insurgents, that social rejection is even more severe and increases the risks for both mother and child. A 2016 study by UNICEF and International Alert found that: “Women and girls who spent time in captivity are often referred to by communities as ‘Boko Haram wives,’ and there appears to be little distinction made between those who were forcibly ‘married,’ even under threat of execution, and others.”¹⁷⁹ Even families who accept their daughters when they return from captivity often refuse to accept their daughters’ children fathered by Boko Haram fighters. The children are considered to have the “bad blood” of their fathers.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ GCPEA interview with François L., Luiza, October 28, 2018, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 51.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Our School Became the Battlefield,” p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Security Council, Report of the Secretary General, Children and Armed Conflict, S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 20.

¹⁷⁸ GCPEA interview with Chantal K., Luiza, October 27, 2018, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 51.

¹⁷⁹ See International Alert/UNICEF, “‘Bad Blood,’ Perceptions of children born of conflict-related sexual violence and women and girls associated with Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria,” February 2016, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Nigeria_BadBlood_EN_2016.pdf (accessed August 12, 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Health Consequences of Violence and Abuse

Women and girls who experienced rape and sexual slavery often have long-term physical health problems, and this is especially likely if they were unable to obtain appropriate and timely medical care. Women and girls during or in the aftermath of an attack on their school reported a range of ongoing gynecological problems such as sexually transmitted infections, abdominal pain, and numerous other symptoms that may be physical or psychological, as a result of sexual violence.

Nigeria – Aisha Y., who was 13 at the time she was abducted from her school, reported having been raped repeatedly after being forcibly married to a Boko Haram fighter:

It was very bad. I was so young and innocent. I had such pain. I cried and cried, but he continued to rape me ... I continue to have pain to this day.¹⁸¹

Similarly, Halima U., a young woman who was raped repeatedly while in captivity for three years, reported having serious health problems as a result of the violence she had experienced:

I have been bleeding for so long. I have had gynecological problems since being raped and have been bleeding.... I have not seen any doctor. I wouldn’t even know where to go, and I have no money.¹⁸²

Most of the women and girls interviewed by GCPEA had never sought medical treatment after they were raped and often did not have any information about how to access post-rape care, treatment for HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases, or reproductive services. Both male and female victims face numerous challenges to obtaining proper treatment and support. For those who have survived sexual violence, stigma is often an obstacle to seeking medical or psychosocial care.

Congo – Although some of the girls did ultimately seek medical care after being raped during the Kasai conflict, they were typically not able to do so within the 72 hours necessary for proper medical treatment of rape. For example, Chantal K. reported:

I do not feel well. I feel as if I am infected. I have not seen a doctor or had any tests. Where would I get the test? How would I pay for it?¹⁸³

The UN Team of Experts on the situation in the Kasais also concluded that:

Many of the victims were unable to access medical care within 72 hours of being raped. This was sometimes due to the impossibility of accessing a suitable health center especially in the most isolated places, some having been destroyed in the violence that has occurred since 2016, or because the victim could not afford the cost of the service. So many survivors suffer from physical consequences, including infections, fistulas (vaginal or anal tears), or other recurring gynecological problems that affect their ability to perform domestic tasks or a professional activity necessary to provide for the needs of their families; they also suffer from psychological consequences.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ GCPEA interview with Aisha Y., Maiduguri, October 10, 2017, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 59.

¹⁸² GCPEA interview with Halima U., Maiduguri, October 10, 2017, in GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 59.

¹⁸³ GCPEA interview with Chantal K., Luiza, October 27, 2018, GCPEA, “All that I Have Lost,” p. 52.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Council, “Report of the Team of International Experts on the situation in the Kasais,” para. 408.



Children in Michika in Adamawa state learn in a shed after the school in their community was destroyed by Boko Haram. Plan International is supporting the government by constructing Temporary Learning Spaces, providing teaching and learning materials, and recruiting volunteers to teach due to a shortage of teachers.

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CONCLUSION AND EXPANDED RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact on girls and women of attacks on education is profoundly injurious and long-lasting. As this report has demonstrated, in many countries around the world, female students suffer horrific acts of violence, including rape, forced “marriage” and sexual slavery, while trying to access education. Such attacks often cause devastating long-term consequences such as loss of education, child and forced “marriage”, early pregnancy, and stigma associated with sexual violence and children born from rape, all of which can dramatically affect female students’ futures, as well as the futures of their communities and countries.

All girls and women have the right to education without fear of threat, harassment, abduction, forced recruitment or sexual and gender-based violence. The right to life, security of person and bodily integrity, and the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are guaranteed by numerous international human rights treaties.¹⁸⁵ Sexual violence, which may include rape, sexual slavery, and forced “marriage” and pregnancy, is recognized as a violation of these fundamental rights. Education is a basic right enshrined in numerous international treaties. Attacks on education, as well as the use of schools for military purposes, can violate the right to an education. (See also Annex I, Legal Obligations Under International Law, and Annex II, International Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict)

Governments have a responsibility to protect schools and ensure that they are safe for students and teachers and to adopt effective measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish serious human rights violations. This includes an obligation to protect female students and teachers from the recruitment, abduction, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment documented in this report, and to develop effective responses to alleviate the harm that many have suffered due to these abuses.¹⁸⁶

Even in the context of an active conflict, there are effective strategies that can reduce harm to students and teachers, including girls and women. The Safe Schools Declaration is a tool that countries should endorse, and all countries should now implement in a more gender-responsive way to take into account the specific ways that females are targeted and/or impacted by attacks on education.¹⁸⁷

The following recommendations draw on GCPEA’s recommendations in previous reports such as, *What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions*, regarding the protection of women and girls and the protection of education.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, Art. 12; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), adopted December 10, 1984, G.A. Res. 39/46, annex, 39 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 197, U.N. Doc. A/39/51 (1984), entered into force June 26, 1987; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No.49), U.N. doc A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990.

¹⁸⁶ The abuses documented in this report violate a number of rights enshrined in international law. The right to life, security of person and bodily integrity, and the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are guaranteed by numerous international human rights treaties. Sexual violence, which may include rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage and pregnancy, is recognized as a violation of these fundamental rights.

¹⁸⁷ These recommendations were reviewed by GCPEA’s working group on protecting women and girls, which is comprised of education in emergencies and gender experts from a range of UN agencies and international NGOs. The recommendations are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive.

¹⁸⁸ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions,” 2018, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_can_be_done_to_better_protect_women_and_girls.pdf; and “Technical Guide: What Teachers and School Administrators Can Do to Protect Education from Attack,” April 2017, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/technical_guide_2017.pdf. http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_ministries.pdf. See also, GCPEA, “What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use,” September 2016, pp. 38-39, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf, (accessed August 30, 2017); and “What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education from Attack,” December 2015.

To Government Authorities

End Attacks on Girls’ Education/Military Use of Schools

- **Endorse and Implement the Safe Schools Declaration.** All governments should endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and take measures to implement the Declaration fully, including in a gender-responsive manner, by ensuring that there is a national legal framework that criminalizes the commission of grave crimes against children, as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1539; and
- **End military use of schools.** Governments should fully implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict as a minimum standard and should intensify efforts to raise awareness about the risks associated with the military use of educational infrastructure, including the particular risks for women and girls.

Improve School Security for Female Students and Teachers

- **Conduct multi-hazard risk analyses for schools, particularly in conflict-affected areas.** The risk analysis should identify possible threats to the school, students, and teachers and assess the probability of future attack. Risk analyses should also assess vulnerabilities in school infrastructure, assess and map evacuation routes, and identify the adequacy of means to minimize risks and vulnerabilities. Risk assessments should be conducted in collaboration with local communities and should consult and engage students, including in particular adolescent girls, as well as teachers, and school administrators;
- **Strengthen bottom up capacity and engagement in preparedness planning, multi-hazard risk assessment, and school safety and security.** Governments should recognize and leverage pre-existing local structures to protect children and teachers, including by consulting parents and parents’ committees, learners, teachers, and other education personnel on where and how to reduce risk to children in and around learning environments. Parents and community leaders should work to ensure that the learning environment is safe and secure, including by becoming and remaining involved in risk assessments (see above), developing security protocols and protection response mechanisms, and selecting teachers who are trained or willing to be trained on protection measures;¹⁸⁹
- **Ensure that each school has a comprehensive school-based safety and security plan.** Governments should make sure that formal and non-formal education, protection and justice stakeholders at the community and regional levels have received support (for capacity-building, coordination efforts, budgeting, and human resources appointed as focal points) in order for each school to have a comprehensive school-based safety and security plan linked to relevant sectors. Such a plan should take into account measures such as the establishment of school safety committees, locally developed coordination mechanisms, comprehensive planning processes, risk assessments, response plans, training for education personnel, community members, parents, and students in the implementation of the safety plan, and early warning systems;¹⁹⁰
- **Establish school security committees.** Governments should establish a body or identify an existing body (such as a school management committee or parent-teacher association) within each school with the explicit responsibility for developing and implementing comprehensive school-based safety and security plans. The committee should pay special attention to the specific concerns and protection needs of girls and women, and should involve female students and teachers, as well as parents, in the development and implementation of security plans (see below);

¹⁸⁹ See INEE Pocket Guide to Gender, “Gender Equality in and through Education,” 2010, pp. 60-61, http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1009/INEE_Pocket_Guide_to_Gender_EN.pdf, (accessed November 28, 2017).

¹⁹⁰ For additional information, see GCPEA, “What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use,” September 2016, pp. 38-39, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf, (accessed August 30, 2017).

- **Create systematic early warning systems.** Governments should enlist the input of those most affected by attacks on education, including in particular girls and teachers, to create early warning systems and participatory risk mapping and planning;
- **Ensure Up-to-date Security Information.** Governments should provide school administrators, students, and teachers, Ministry of Education personnel, and local communities with accurate, up-to-date security information, including specific information on the risks of sexual violence;
- **Ensure that schools have emergency communications protocols.** Improved communications systems are essential, especially in remote areas, if school administrators and teachers are to be able to alert students and take appropriate action when a threat is imminent. Such systems should include direct lines to the nearest security forces and police, with a specific, pre-designated contact point within these units;
- **Provide emergency preparedness training.** Government authorities should provide teachers and other formal and non-formal education personnel with appropriate emergency preparedness training, including by conducting regular school drills and review of security protocols, to ensure that students and staff understand what types of events trigger an emergency response and to enhance their ability to implement relevant security protocols;
- **Increase presence of female teachers/assistants.** Governments should develop measures to encourage more women to become teachers. Where female teachers are not available, schools should recruit women from the community as teaching assistants to promote a more protective environment for children;¹⁹¹
- **Strengthen data collection related to school security.** Governments should strengthen and systematize data collection related to school security, including data on specific threats to the safety of female students and teachers and the steps being taken to improve security, including specifically for women and girls. Furthermore, in line with UNESCO’s recommendations, governments should “develop gender-sensitive education sector plans which disaggregate all indicators by sex and analyze barriers to girls’ and boys’ education,” including barriers related to insecurity and the threat of SGBV;¹⁹²
- **Adopt gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive education policies.** Governments, as well as provincial or state governments and relevant national and provincial or state ministries, should develop gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive educational policies and practices, in accordance with the INEE Minimum Standards for Education, INEE Guiding Principles on Conflict Sensitive Education,¹⁹³ IASC’s Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action, and UNFPA’s Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence. Ensure that these policies are disseminated widely to relevant levels within the national education system and that all actors with implementation responsibilities are fully trained to operationalize the policies; and
- **Inform parents and caregivers of security measures being taken.** Communicate regularly with parents and caregivers about security planning, measures, and assessments, to allow parents, particularly parents of girls, to make informed decisions about their children’s security and education. Take steps to ensure that mothers and female caregivers are also informed of security measures.

¹⁹¹ A UNESCO advocacy report states, “One of the most compelling arguments for increasing the number of women teachers in schools relates to the positive impact that doing so has on girls’ education. There is evidence to show a correlation between the number of women teachers and girls’ enrollment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.” UNESCO, “The Impact of Women Teachers on Girls’ Education: Advocacy Brief,” 2008, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pfo000145990> (accessed February 19, 2019), p. 1. See also, Right to Education, <https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen> (accessed February 19, 2019).

¹⁹² UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report, http://gem-report-2017.unesco.org/en/chapter/gender_recommendations/, (accessed February 19, 2019).

¹⁹³ See INEE, “Guiding Principles on Integrating Conflict Sensitivity in Education Policy and Programming in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Contexts,” <https://www.inee-site.org/en/conflict-sensitive-education>.

Fill the Data Gap on Attacks on Education on Women and Girls

- **Enhance monitoring and reporting.** Governments should strengthen monitoring and reporting on attacks on education, including by disaggregating data by sex on numbers of students and teachers affected; and
- **Report on sexual violence.** Governments should document and report incidents of sexual violence that occur at school or on route to schools, and during or in the wake of an attack on a school, so that this violence can also be captured as attacks on education.

Ensure Reintegration and Prevent Future Recruitment

- **Investigate and prosecute those who have recruited and used girls.** Governments should impartially investigate and prosecute anyone responsible for the recruitment and use of girls, and the abduction or other serious abuses against girls and women documented in this report;
- **Develop targeted reintegration interventions.** Governments, with the support of international donors, should develop comprehensive strategies for the reintegration of girls formerly associated with armed parties;
- **Conduct inclusive community outreach to raise awareness about violence suffered by recruited girls and women.** Governments, in collaboration with international and non-governmental organizations, should develop programs to raise community awareness about the violence and abuses suffered by girls formerly associated with armed parties, as well as the vulnerabilities and risks faced by these girls and women and their children; and
- **Expand training opportunities for teachers on conflict-sensitive education and psychosocial support.** Governments, with the support of international donors, should scale up training programs for teachers on conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive education, social inclusion, and how to support and care for students suffering from post-traumatic stress, including specifically girls suffering from psychological trauma and stigma from sexual violence.

End Sexual and Gender-based Violence/Provide Appropriate Services

- **Establish a zero-tolerance policy on sexual and gender-based violence.** As a matter of utmost urgency, governments should adopt a no-tolerance approach to attacks on education, including sexual and gender-based violence and other abuses against girls and women committed in the context of such attacks, whether committed by non-state armed groups or government forces;
- **End impunity for sexual violence.** (See Ensure Accountability for Violations of Humanitarian and Human Rights Law below);
 - **Train national defense and security forces on the prohibition of sexual violence;**
 - **Protect and Support Victims of Sexual Violence.** Governments should develop measures to protect and support victims to lodge complaints and testify before the courts regarding incidents of sexual violence;
 - **Increase access to medical and psychosocial support for victims.** Governments should take necessary steps to expand availability of free and confidential medical and psychosocial services for victims of conflict-related violence, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, and ensure that victims are aware of such services and how to access them. Governments should also ensure that staff at medical facilities are trained to deliver confidential and comprehensive medical treatment and psychosocial support, including post-rape care in accordance with World Health Organization (WHO) standards; and
 - **Support children born as a result of rape, including by forced “marriage”.** Government authorities, in collaboration with NGOs, should provide specialized psychosocial support and other services for children born as a result of rape by militia members or government forces, including ensuring their access to schooling and long-term child protection monitoring and support.

- **End child marriage.** Governments should take steps to end child marriage, including by
 - setting the legal age of marriage at 18 for both men and women and enforcing the law in all regions of the country;
 - educating and empowering girls to avoid child marriage by scaling up programs at the community level in partnership with local leaders (religious leaders, women’s and youth unions, etc.) that teach girls about their rights, including the legal prohibition against marriage before the age of 18, and empowering them with access to education, vocational training, life-skills programming, and economic empowerment opportunities; and
 - raising awareness of communities, including parents and adolescents, about the negative impact of child marriage and the benefits of girls’ education and engaging religious and community leaders in efforts to help girls avoid child marriage.
- **Develop effective responses to harm caused by child marriage.** Governments, in collaboration and consultation with civil society, should develop effective responses to the harm caused by child marriage, including by
 - educating and empowering girls after child marriage and developing special programs to encourage and support the continuation of education after marriage or, where that is not possible, economic empowerment programs and skills acquisition initiatives; and
 - developing programs designed to address the maternal health and family planning needs of adolescent girls. Outreach efforts should be undertaken to ensure that adolescent girls are made aware of the availability of such services and provided with information on how to access them.

Ensure Access to Uninterrupted Safe Education for Girls

- **Minimize disruption of education.** Take all appropriate measures to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible to students’ education, including by considering whether students can be safely relocated to schools in more secure areas when their schools must be closed due to insecurity, or by ensuring that they have alternative means of accessing education;
- **Support flexible educational arrangements.** Governments should support and expand, with international donor funding, formal and non-formal accelerated education opportunities. These should be certified programs that allow those who have missed out on education to catch up on missed learning;
- **Provide incentives for girls’ education.** Governments should create targeted interventions to enhance school enrollment and attendance and to encourage families to send girls to school on an equal basis with boys, including cash incentives, food distribution at school, and scholarships to cover school fees;
- **Create safe spaces for girls.** Governments, working closely with international actors, should create safe spaces for girls that provide nonformal and accelerated education, life-skills training, economic empowerment opportunities, and include information on and referrals for reproductive health and SGBV services; and
- **Address the financial impediments preventing children from attending schools,** such as mandatory school fees, and at minimum suspend mandatory school fees in areas affected by conflict.

Ensure Accountability for Violations of Humanitarian and Human Rights Law

- **Investigate and prosecute attacks on girls’ education.** Governments should investigate and prosecute attacks on girls’ education including sexual violence and intensify training of national defense and security forces on the prohibition of and consequences for those who engage in attacks on girls’ education or sexual violence;

- **Prohibit anyone convicted of crimes of sexual violence from remaining in or rejoining any security forces in any location;** and
- **Support international accountability measures for attacks on schools, recruitment and use of children, and sexual violence.** Governments, with the support of international agencies, should promote accountability measures through international channels, such as the International Criminal Court, the Human Rights Council, UN Security Council and UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies, among others.

To Non-State Armed Groups

GCPEA also makes recommendations to non-state armed groups regarding serious abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law perpetrated by their commanders and fighters:

- **Cease attacks on education.** As a matter of utmost urgency, the leaders of non-state armed groups should cease all attacks on education, including attacks on schools, students, and teachers;
- **End all recruitment and use of children.** Leaders of non-state armed groups should stop recruitment and use of children under 18 years of age, and suspend from their positions, pending investigations, any commanders who are credibly alleged to have recruited and used child soldiers;
- **Prevent sexual and gender-based violence.** Commanders of non-state armed groups should take all steps necessary to prevent SGBV by its combatants, including by halting all child or forced “marriage”s, and hold combatants accountable, in accordance with international standards;
- **Integrate the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.*** Leaders of non-state armed groups should order commanders not to use school buildings or school property for military purposes and implement the *Guidelines*, taking into account the ways in which female students and educators may be impacted by having non-state armed groups in the vicinity of their schools; and
- **Ensure compliance with international law.** The leadership of non-state armed groups should take all measures necessary to ensure that their combatants strictly comply with international humanitarian law and the principles of international human rights law, including for example by issuing command orders and adopting internal policies that incorporate international humanitarian law obligations regarding the protection of education, the prohibition against sexual violence, and against recruitment and use of children. Among other things, leaders of non-state armed groups should identify all children within their ranks, separate and hand them over to the UN, and grant unlimited access to the UN to verify the presence of children in their respective bases.

To the International Community

The UN, including its peacekeeping missions, where relevant, donor governments, and international humanitarian actors are already providing support and programmatic responses to many of the concerns raised in this report. However, the needs of victims of armed conflict, including the multiple needs of women and girl survivors of attacks on education, far exceed current resources. GCPEA therefore calls on the international community to privately and publicly urge governments to adopt the recommendations included in this report and to increase its own support for the interventions recommended:

Improve School Security for Female Students and Teachers

- **Advocate for comprehensive and sustained measures to protect education from attack.** International actors should intensify advocacy with governments to prioritize security of schools, including the urgent assessment of security risks for schools;

- **Provide support for enhanced protection measures.** International donors should expand support for enhanced security measures, including emergency communications systems, especially for remote areas, systematic early warning systems, the development of comprehensive school-based safety and security plans, and programs to provide security training for educators and students;
- **Support expanded mandates for peacekeeping missions.** The UN and member states should ensure that the mandates of peacekeeping missions include and have the capacity for monitoring, reporting and responding to attacks on schools, military use of schools, and abductions, recruitment, and use of children.
- **Support risk analyses for schools, particularly in conflict-affected regions.** International actors should encourage and provide funding to identify threats to schools, students, and teachers, and assess vulnerabilities in school infrastructure, assess and map evacuation routes, and identify the adequacy of means to minimize risks and vulnerabilities; and
- **Support implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.** The international community should encourage and support governments to fully implement the commitments in the Safe Schools Declaration at all levels of education and take immediate steps to account for the specific needs and experiences of women and girls in the process of implementation. This includes supporting efforts to raise awareness among security and military actors, community leaders and members, and state authorities, of the risks associated with the military use of educational infrastructure and of the particular risks for women and girls.

Access to Education

- **Devote more funding to education in emergencies.** The international community should work with governments to ensure adequate funding for the construction of emergency primary and secondary schools in areas where schools have been destroyed, and ensure that the special needs of female students and teachers are fully addressed in newly refurbished or rebuilt schools;
- **Support specialized outreach to female victims of attacks on education.** International donors should support the expansion of specialized outreach to female victims of attacks on education, including those who have suffered from recruitment, abduction, sexual violence, and other abuses documented in this report, in order to address their specific needs. They should also support, and where possible expand, the provision of medical and psychosocial assistance to victims of attacks on education, taking into account the specific needs and experiences of women and girls;
- **Train teachers and other local actors across sectors on conflict sensitive education and psychosocial support.** International donors should work with governments to establish or scale up training programs for teachers on conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive education, and how to support and care for students suffering from post-traumatic stress, including specifically, girls suffering from the psychological trauma and stigma of sexual violence; and
- **Support efforts to minimize disruption of learning.** International donors should expand their support for efforts to minimize conflict-related disruptions to education by targeting additional funding for the development and provision of alternative means of accessing education, including non-formal and accelerated learning opportunities, and alternative delivery of education, in the absence of formal ones, as well as the establishment of safe spaces for girls that provide such non-formal and accelerated learning.

Programs to Prevent SGBV and Mitigate Harm

- **Support targeted reintegration interventions.** International donors should support the development of comprehensive strategies for the reintegration of girls formerly associated with armed parties; and

- **Support efforts to expand access to medical and psychosocial support for victims.** International donors should expand support for programs that provide free and confidential medical and psychosocial services for victims of conflict-related violence, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, and ensure that victims are aware of such services and how to access them.

Programs to Prevent and Mitigate Harm of Child Marriage

- **Support effective interventions to end child marriage.** International donors should increase efforts to combat child marriage, including programs to provide information, sensitization and awareness-raising on the rights and concerns of female students, and to bring about behavioral change. They should expand measures to diminish the harm caused by child marriage, including special programs to encourage continuation of education after marriage or, where that is not possible, economic empowerment programs and skills acquisition initiatives.

Efforts to Combat Impunity

- **Support international accountability measures.** International actors should continue to promote and support international accountability measures with relevant governments, including through international channels, such as the International Criminal Court, the Human Rights Council, UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies, and the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations committed against children in times of armed conflict, among others.

Fill the Data Gap on Attacks on Education on Women and Girls

- **Support efforts to strengthen monitoring and reporting at national level.** International organizations and influential governments should advocate with conflict-affected governments to strengthen and systematize data collection related to school security, including data on specific threats to the safety of female students and teachers and incidents and threats of sexual violence that occur during or in the wake of an attack on a school, so that this violence can also be captured as attacks on education; and
- **Strengthen monitoring and reporting at international level.** International actors should advocate and support efforts to strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities, including by collecting and reporting data that is disaggregated by gender, on numbers of students and teachers affected.

Afghan girls study at an open area, founded by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), outside Jalalabad city, Afghanistan September 16, 2015.

© REUTERS/Parwiz TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY



ANNEX I

Obligations Under International Law

Prohibitions Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The abuses documented in this report violate a number of rights enshrined in international law. The right to life, security of person and bodily integrity, and the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment are guaranteed by numerous international human rights treaties.¹⁹⁴ Sexual violence, which may include rape, sexual slavery, and forced “marriage” and pregnancy, is recognized as a violation of these fundamental rights.¹⁹⁵

International humanitarian law prohibits intentionally attacking or harming civilians or others who are not taking part in hostilities. The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977 set out the main obligations of international humanitarian law, which prohibits intentionally attacking or harming civilians or others who are not taking part in hostilities. It applies to non-state armed groups, as well as government forces, and is applicable during internal armed conflicts. Article III common to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 requires that all civilians and persons *hors de combat* be protected from torture and cruel, inhuman, humiliating or degrading treatment.¹⁹⁶ It also specifically requires that all civilians and persons *hors de combat* be protected from rape or other forms of sexual violence.¹⁹⁷

Pursuant to international humanitarian law, rape and other forms of sexual violence may be considered a war crime and, if carried out as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, a crime against humanity. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (the Rome Statute), includes rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and other forms of sexual violence within its mandate.¹⁹⁸ War crimes and crimes against humanity can be prosecuted in domestic courts or by the ICC.

International human rights treaties also provide relevant standards for the protection of persons on a country’s territory, including specific provisions related to the rights of women and girls. Pursuant to these instruments, governments have an obligation to adopt effective measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish serious human rights abuses. This obligation extends to protecting women and girls from abduction, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment.¹⁹⁹ Governments have a duty to investigate and prosecute serious human rights abuses, whether committed by an agent of the state or a non-state armed group.

¹⁹⁴ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, Art. 12; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), adopted December 10, 1984, G.A. res. 39/46, annex, 39 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 197, U.N. Doc. A/39/51 (1984), entered into force June 26, 1987; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No.49), U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990.

¹⁹⁵ The Rome Statute of the ICC states that “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, http://legal.un.org/icc/statute/99_corr/cstatute.htm (accessed February 12, 2019), art. 7(1)(g), related to crimes against humanity, and art. 8(2)(e)(vi), related to war crimes in conflicts not of an international character.

¹⁹⁶ See Common Article III to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, adopted August 12, 1949, entered into force October 21, 1950.

¹⁹⁷ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 1125 U.N.T.S. 609, entered into force December 7, 1978, Art. 4 (2)(e).

¹⁹⁸ The Rome Statute of the ICC states that “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, http://legal.un.org/icc/statute/99_corr/cstatute.htm (accessed February 12, 2019), art. 7(1)(g), related to crimes against humanity, and art. 8(2)(e)(vi), related to war crimes in conflicts not of an international character.

¹⁹⁹ Article 2 of the ICCPR requires governments to provide an effective remedy for abuses and to ensure the rights to life and security of the person of all individuals in their jurisdiction, without distinction of any kind including sex.

Prohibitions Against Recruitment and Use of Children in Combat

International law proscribes the recruitment and use of children by armed forces or non-state armed groups. It is a crime under international humanitarian law, the “laws of war,” and international criminal law to recruit or use children under 15 years of age.²⁰⁰ Such recruitment or use is considered a war crime.²⁰¹ International human rights law also prohibits the recruitment or use of all children, setting the age of lawful conscription or use of a person by armed forces or groups at 18 years of age or older.²⁰²

Prohibition Against Forced and Child Marriage

Forced Marriage

International human rights law protects girls and women from forced “marriage”. Article 16 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure... b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.²⁰³

Similarly, the ICCPR states that “No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”²⁰⁴

Child Marriage

Child marriage, a marriage in which at least one party is under the age of 18, violates a number of human rights principles. International human rights bodies have made clear that child marriage is “a form of gender-based violence which disproportionately affects women and girls.”²⁰⁵ As such, it violates a number of human rights instruments that guarantee non-discrimination.²⁰⁶ “The Committees on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and on the Rights of the Child have both described forced and child marriage as a manifestation of discrimination against women and girls, a violation of their rights and an obstacle to the girl child’s full enjoyment of her rights.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ See Protocol 11, art.4 (3)(c). The recruitment and use of children under 15 is considered a crime under other customary international humanitarian law. See ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, rule 136 and 137. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court lists “conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years” into “armed forces or groups” or “using them to participate actively in hostilities” as war crimes (arts. 8(2)(b)(xxvi) and 8(2) (e) (vii)). It also prohibits children’s active participation not only in combat but also in scouting, spying, and direct support functions. Several UN Security Council resolutions condemn the recruitment and use of children in hostilities, including Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000) 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004), 1612 (2005), 1882 (2009), and 1998 (2011) on children and armed conflict.

²⁰¹ See ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 156, https://www.icrc.org/customaryihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule156.

²⁰² See https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/vwTreatiesByCountrySelected.xsp?xp_countrySelected=CD (accessed December 20, 2018). The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) “was the world’s first international treaty wholly focused on ending the military exploitation of children. The treaty prohibits the conscription of children under the age of 18 and their participation in hostilities. It also prohibits the voluntary recruitment of children by non-state armed groups, although it allows state armed forces to recruit from age 16, as long as the children recruited are not sent to war.” See Child Soldiers International, <https://www.child-soldiers.org/international-laws-and-child-rights>.

²⁰³ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted December 18, 1979, G.A. res. 34/180, 34 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 46) at 193, U.N. Doc. A/34/46, entered into force September 3, 1981, art.16(1)(b).

²⁰⁴ ICCPR, art. 23 (3).

²⁰⁵ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage,” April 2, 2014, A/HRC/26/22, para. 16.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, ICCPR, art.2, paras. 1 and 3, ICESCR, art. 2, paras. 2 and 3, and CEDAW, art. 16.

²⁰⁷ OHCHR, “Preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage,” para. 16.

Both forced and child marriage may be considered slave-like practices. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has stated:

Women and girls in situations of child and forced “marriage” may experience conditions inside a marriage which meet “international legal definitions of slavery and slavery-like practices” including servile marriage, sexual slavery, child servitude, child trafficking and forced labour, and “a potentially high proportion of child marriage cases appear to constitute the worst forms of child labour under the 1999 ILO Convention No. 182.”²⁰⁸

Right to Health

The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is enshrined in various international treaties. Violence against women, including sexual violence, has been recognized as violating the right to health.²⁰⁹ Numerous international bodies have noted that child marriage can have serious negative consequences for girls’ health, including early and frequent pregnancies, high maternal mortality rates, a heightened risk of sexually transmitted infections, and a higher rate of pregnancy-related complications, including obstetric fistula. The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which oversees implementation of the ICESCR, has recognized that “women and girls living in conflict situations are disproportionately exposed to a high risk of violation of their rights, including through systematic rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and forced sterilization.”²¹⁰

Governments have an obligation to ensure that those who have ongoing health problems because of such violence have access to care and support necessary for them to fully enjoy this right.

Right to Education

Education is a basic right enshrined in numerous international treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This right is guaranteed without discrimination, including on the basis of sex. Attacks on education, as well as the use of schools for military purposes, can violate the right to an education. Governments have a responsibility to protect schools and ensure that they are safe for students and teachers. They must also take all possible measures to mitigate the harm caused by attacks on schools, including the harm caused by abductions of female students and teachers, forced “marriage”, rape and other sexual violence committed by non-state armed groups.

²⁰⁸ OHCHR, “Preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage,” para. 21, citing Anti-Slavery International, “Out of the Shadows: Child marriage and slavery,” (April 2013).

²⁰⁹ See, for example, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force January 3, 1976, art. 12.

²¹⁰ UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 22 (2016) on the right to sexual and reproductive health (article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/GC/22, May 2, 2016, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2fGC%2f22&Lang=en (accessed July 1, 2018), art. 1.

ANNEX II

International Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict

The Safe School Declaration

The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express support for protecting education from attack during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during war; and the implementation of concrete measures to deter the military use of schools. When they endorse the Declaration, states endorse and commit to use the *Guidelines on Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict*.²¹¹

Although the Guidelines are not legally binding, they complement and draw on existing obligations in existing international humanitarian and human rights law. A core aim of the Guidelines is to protect against the risk of armed forces and groups converting schools and universities into military objectives by way of military use and exposing them to the potentially devastating consequences of attack. While it is acknowledged that certain uses would not be contrary to the law of armed conflict, all parties should endeavor to avoid impinging on students’ safety and education, using the Guidelines as a guide to responsible practice.²¹²

Legal Framework Relating to Military Use of Schools During Armed Conflict²¹³

The legal framework applicable to the targeting of schools and universities, and the use of schools and universities in support of the military effort, during armed conflicts is found primarily in international humanitarian law, which is the body of law that regulates conduct in international and non-international armed conflicts.

The law of armed conflict restricts the targeting of schools and universities, and the use of schools and universities in support of the military effort, but it does not prohibit such use in all circumstances and allows for the targeting of schools and universities when they become military objectives.

Schools and universities are normally civilian objects and, as such, shall not be the object of attack unless they become military objectives.²¹⁴ Indeed, to intentionally direct attacks against them when they are not military objectives would constitute a war crime. Military objectives, in so far as objects are concerned, are defined as objects which by their nature, location, purpose, or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture, or neutralization, in the circumstances at the time, offers a definite military objective.²¹⁵ In case of doubt whether a school or university is being used to make an effective contribution to military action, it shall be presumed not to be so used and thus to be a civilian object.²¹⁶

²¹¹ GCPEA, “Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict”, December 2014, http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf. The Declaration was developed through consultations with states in a process led by Norway and Argentina in Geneva in 2015.

²¹² See http://www.protectingeducation.org/safeschoolsdeclaration#what_do_the_guidelines_say.

²¹³ This section is adapted from GCPEA, “Implementing the Guidelines: A Toolkit to Guide Understanding and Implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict,” Annex ii, pp. 46-48, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/toolkit.pdf>.

²¹⁴ See Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (“Additional Protocol I”), art. 52(1). This rule is also part of customary law for international and non-international armed conflicts. See Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, *Customary International Humanitarian Law: Rules, vol. 1, International Committee of the Red Cross (“ICRC Customary IHL Study”)*, rule 9 and 10.

²¹⁵ See Additional Protocol I, art. 52(2). This rule is also part of customary law for international and non-international armed conflicts. See ICRC Customary IHL Study, rule 8. See also ICTY, Final Report to the Prosecutor by the Committee Established to Review the NATO Bombing Campaign Against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, The Hague, June 14, 2000, para. 41.

²¹⁶ See Additional Protocol I, art. 52(3). The principle of presumption of civilian character in case of doubt is also contained in Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The customary character of this rule is not fully established, but it is clear that in case of doubt, a careful assessment has to be made. See ICRC Customary IHL Study, commentary to rule 10.

The law of armed conflict requires the parties to a conflict to take precautions against the effects of attack. To the extent that schools and universities are civilian objects, parties to an armed conflict shall, to the maximum extent feasible, a) avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas where schools and universities are likely to be located; b) endeavor to remove the civilian population, individual civilians and civilian objects under their control from the vicinity of military objectives; and c) take the other necessary precautions to protect those schools and universities under their control against the dangers resulting from military operations.²¹⁷ These rules have important implications for schools and universities.

Turning a school or university into a military objective (for example, by using it as a military barracks) subjects it to possible attacks from the enemy that might be lawful under the law of armed conflict. Locating military objectives (a weapons store, for example) near a school or university also increases the risk that it will suffer incidental damage from an attack against those nearby military objectives that might be lawful under the law of armed conflict.

The above-mentioned rules must not be read in a void. Account must be taken of other relevant rules and principles of the law of armed conflict.²¹⁸ Among these rules are those affording a special protection to children in armed conflict situations.²¹⁹ If education institutions are fully or partially used for military purposes, the life and physical integrity of children might be at risk²²⁰ and access to education is restricted or even impeded either because children may not go to school for fear of being killed or injured in an attack by the opposing forces, or because they have been deprived of their usual educational building.

Under Additional Protocol II, applicable during non-international armed conflicts, it is a “fundamental guarantee” that children shall receive an education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents.²²¹

As a consequence, before using a school or university in support of the military effort, consideration should be given to all relevant rules and principles of the law of armed conflict, in particular the obligation to take precautions against the effects of attack, the special protection afforded to educational institutions that also constitute cultural property, the importance of ensuring access to education in armed conflicts, the prohibition of human shields, and the special protection afforded to children in armed conflicts.

International humanitarian law imposes a legal obligation on all parties to an armed conflict, both government armed forces and non-state armed groups, to minimize the harm to civilians. A fundamental principle of international humanitarian law is the obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives.²²²

²¹⁷ See Additional Protocol I, art. 58(a), (b), and (c). These rules are also part of customary law for international and non-international armed conflicts. See ICRC Customary IHL Study, rules 22-24. See also: ICTY, Kupreskic case, Judgment, Trial Chamber, January 14, 2000, paras. 524-525.

²¹⁸ This is a traditional rule of interpretation. See Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, art. 31(1): “A treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose.”

²¹⁹ On the special protection afforded to children in armed conflicts, see Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (“Fourth Geneva Convention”), arts. 14, 17, 23, 24, 38, 50, 82, 89, 94, 132; Additional Protocol I, art. 70, 77, 78; Additional Protocol II, art. 4 and 6.

²²⁰ It should be noted in particular that the law of armed conflict foresees the creation of safety zones and localities so organized as to protect from the effects of war children under fifteen (See Fourth Geneva Convention, art. 14.) This indicates that the law of armed conflict puts a particular emphasis on the protection of children from the effects of attacks.

²²¹ Additional Protocol II, art. 4(3)(a).

²²² ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, rule 7, arts. 48 and 52(2).



(cover) Girl abducted by Kamuina Nsapu militia during an attack on her secondary school in Dimbelenge in November 2016. She was later assaulted at the “tshiota” (initiation fire), and harassed by soldiers until she abandoned her school and fled the area.

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