



The UPR and Protecting Education in Conflict

Side event to 57th HRC session

Concept Note

Date: 18 September

Time: 13:00-14:00

Place: Palais des Nations, room XXV

Co-organizers: UPR Info, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attacks (GCPEA),

Supported by: Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict, Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, Safe Schools Declaration Core Group

Context: The right to education is a fundamental human right and indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. Yet, around the world, children and other learners living in conflict zones are being continuously denied this right. Students and education personnel are increasingly exposed to grave human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity resulting from attacks on schools and universities. These include indiscriminate attacks on schools, arbitrary killing of students and education personnel, sexual and gender-based violence, and recruitment of children by armed forces or armed groups. Girls and persons with disabilities are uniquely impacted by attacks. The need for better protection of education in conflict is, unfortunately, more pressing than ever.

The 2024 Secretary-General's annual reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and on children and armed conflict have raised alarm. The most recent findings of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)'s research echo the UN concerns and show that attacks on education and military use of education facilities are on the rise globally¹. Nevertheless, it also shows that good practices are emerging, including with regard to the implementation of the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) and the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#).

Endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and its Guidelines have been called upon by key UN actors and bodies, including the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for CAAC, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and other Treaty bodies, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. The UN Security Council (SC) and the Human Rights Council (HRC) have welcomed efforts around the Safe Schools Declaration and have been encouraging States to do more to protect education in conflict, including through the SC [resolution 2601 on protecting education](#) (2021) and the HRC [resolution on the right to education](#) (2021).

Given its universality, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) can be an extremely effective mechanism to advance the protection of education as global concern and to respond to the wide-range human rights violations that result from attacks on education in affected countries. Some States are already using the UPR as a catalyst to the endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

¹ <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/education-under-attack-2024/>



However, recommendations on protecting education in conflict remain limited, especially taking into account the evolving context and worrying trends. There is a need to strengthen coordination and collaboration in Geneva between the different agendas and to optimise individual and collective engagement with various Geneva-bodies, mechanisms and processes to achieve greater impact in protecting education.

As confirmed in one of the recommendations of a *Workshop on Advancing the Protection of Education in Conflict* that was held in Geneva in March 2022, there is a need to mainstream the protection of education in conflict agenda and the Safe Schools Declaration into the Human Rights mechanisms in the aim of strengthening accountability for attacks on education as well as a preventive measure dissuading further attacks.

Objective: This HRC 57th session side-event aims to highlight the role that the UPR process can play in strengthening the protection of education in conflict, for example, through the inclusion in UPR recommendations on the endorsement or implementation of the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) and [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#). It also aims to raise awareness on the need for more synergies on the protection of education in conflict across UN Treaty Bodies and UPR.

Format and panellists: This one-hour panel discussion is open to representatives from Member States, experts, and interested civil society organizations.

Welcome and setting scene **Ms. Mona M'BIKAY**, Executive Director at UPR Info (Moderator)

Opening remarks **H.E. Mr. Christophe PAYOT**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative – Permanent Mission of Belgium

Panel interventions **Ms. Ilaria PAOLAZZI**, Senior Advocacy and Policy Adviser at GCPEA
Ms. Mikiko ŌTANI, Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
Mr. Ayman Al-Kenani, Mwatana for Human Rights