



Schools shall be safe sanctuaries

Education International Declaration on Violent Political and
Military Attacks Against Education Institutions, Students,
Teachers, Academics and all other Education Personnel (including
Support and Transport Staff, Education Officials, Education Trade
Unionists and Education Aid Workers)



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale



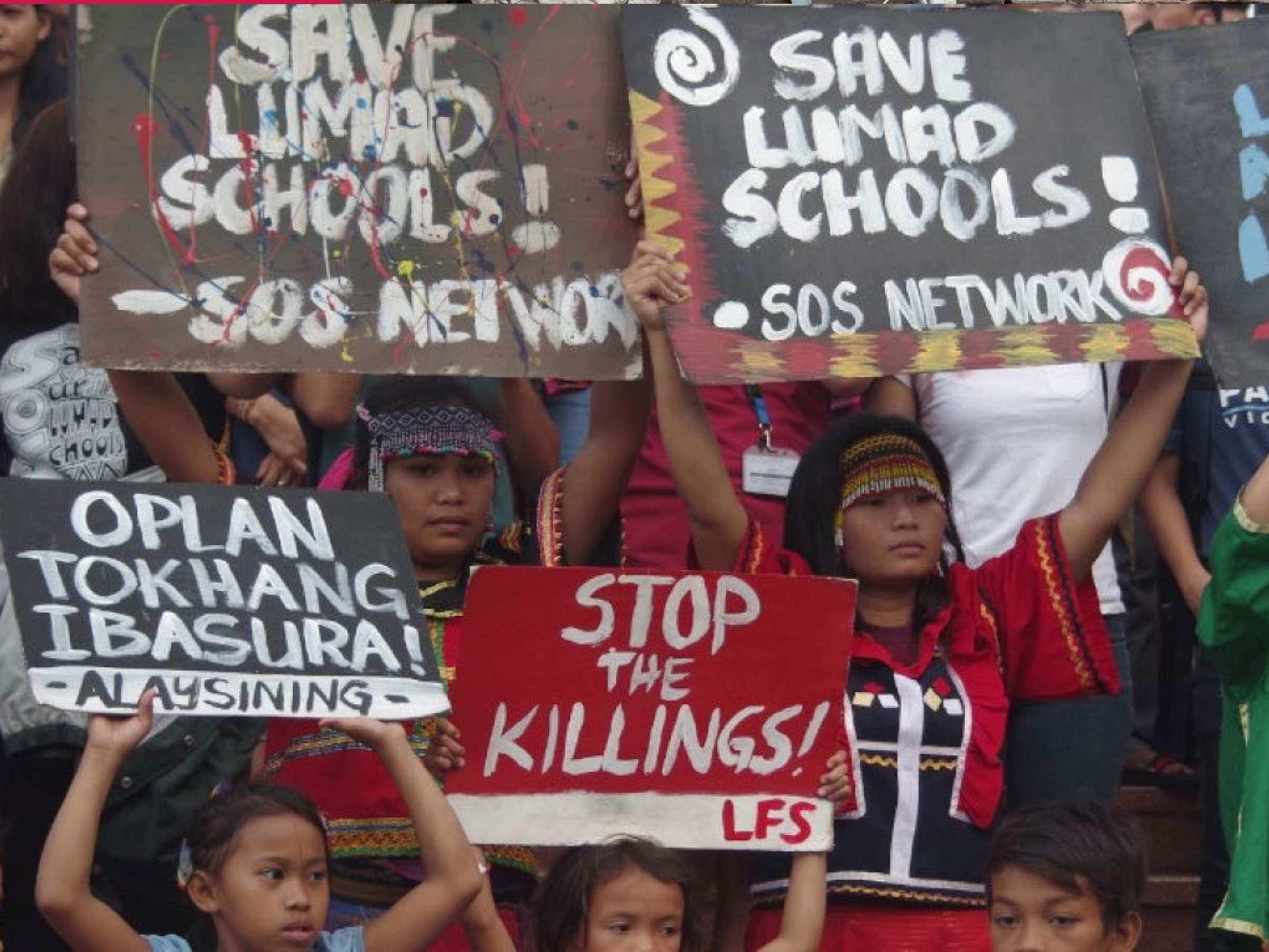
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Schoolboys escorted by Nigerian military after their release from being kidnapped by Boko Haram. 2020 © Isopix / AP Photo/Sunday Alamba



A secondary school building destroyed during the war in Ukraine. 2022 © Mykhaylo Palinchak / Zuma Press / Isopix



Protest against attacks on indigenous schools, Philippines 2019. © Fred Dabu (Flickr)



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Preamble

- 1.** This declaration voices the collective demand by teachers and their unions worldwide that the international community take action to ensure that education is both protected in conflicts and enabled to realize its potential as a force for peace in the world. Therefore EI calls the international community to:
 - Reverse the alarming growth in recent years in the number of violence political and military attacks worldwide against students, teachers, education unionists and education officials, and against education institutions.
 - And deliver on its collective promise made at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 to ensure that schools are “respected and protected as sanctuaries and zones of peace” (Dakar Framework for Action, Expanded commentary, paragraph 58).
- 2.** It notes that rapid rise in the number of such attacks since 2004, as documented by the UNESCO study, Education Under Attack, and the dearth of global reporting on this phenomenon. These attacks take the form of:
 - Multiple deaths by targeted bombings and deliberately sprayed gunfire in places where large numbers of students or education staff congregate.
 - Targeted assassinations of individuals.
 - Destruction of education buildings by bombing, rocket attacks, burning, looting and ransacking.
 - Illegal detention, forced “disappearance” or torture of staff, officials, union members or students.
 - Abduction for extortion, or forced recruitment as child soldiers, or rape by armed forces.
- 3.** Attacks on the lives of teachers and students are abhorrent and morally repugnant in their own right. But they also have a devastating impact on the provision of education and the psychological welfare of students and teachers in those areas most affected.
- 4.** EI notes that attacks against students and education personnel who are not taking part in the conflict and attacks against education institutions are war crimes. When any of these are the result of carrying out a publicly declared order to target or kill civilians they are crimes against humanity. Governments and the international community bear a heavy responsibility to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Yet there has been a widespread failure to end impunity for such attacks.



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- 5.** From a moral standpoint and in line with the internationally agreed commitment to achieving Education for All, the failure of governments and the international community to ensure protection of students, teachers, education officials and education union members from targeted attacks is wholly unacceptable.
- 6.** At the same time, Education International recognizes that there are situations in which education has aggravated or been a catalyst for conflict, whether because of inequitable distribution of education resources, discriminatory or inflammatory curricula, imposition of an alien language of instruction, or alien cultural or religious values, or biased management practices.
- 7.** For this reason, in addition to being sound educational practice, it is essential that school systems and individual schools are run in a way that promote tolerance, understanding, respect of diverse cultures and religions, and conflict resolution in line with the 1966 recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. This would enable them to become zones of peace, actively contributing to the easing of tension, and encourage recognition and respect of places of learning as safe sanctuaries that should not be targeted.



No place for school in the camp: these Syrian children learn under an olive tree, 2020
© Moawia Atrash / Zuma Press / Isopix



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Article 1

Reaffirm the commitment to the principle of the right to education in safety

The international community, governments, and all parties to conflicts shall recognize and respect the right of all children and adults to a safe education in a peaceful learning environment, and shall respect education institutions as safe sanctuaries. The international community calls on the United Nations Security Council to commission the creation of an international symbol for use on education buildings and education transport facilities to encourage recognition that they must be protected and cannot be targeted for attack or used for military purposes.

Article 2

Take practical measures to ensure protection

The UN Security Council, governments and parties to conflict shall take all possible practical measures to protect students, teachers, academics and all other education personnel from all deliberate violent political or military attacks on their way to or from, or at, their places of learning or work; and take all possible measures to deter such attacks. All governments should ensure that national legislation conforms with international law in protecting the right to education in situations where it is under threat and prohibiting attacks on education institutions and those working and learning in them.

Article 3

End impunity for attacks on students, teachers, academics, all other education personnel and education facilities

The international community shall assist in ending impunity for attacks on education, and bring those culpable to justice. It will ensure that humanitarian and human rights instruments are used to prosecute perpetrators of attacks on schools, colleges, universities, education offices, and other education facilities; and perpetrators of attacks on students, teachers, academics, education support staff, education officials, education trade unionists and education aid workers. This explicit focus on attacks on students and staff in addition to buildings and facilities must also be included in the investigations of the International Criminal Court and the UN Secretary General's monitoring of the grave violations against children in armed conflict.



Schools shall be safe sanctuaries

Education International Declaration

Article 4

Strengthen monitoring of attacks and efforts to end impunity

The international community, governments and human rights organisations shall develop systematic means of gathering information to aid the global monitoring and analysis of the frequency, scale, and nature of violent military and political attacks on students, teachers, academics, all other education personnel, and education institutions; and to monitor efforts to end impunity for all attacks. The international community calls on the UN Security Council to support such efforts, as a means of encouraging further action to prevent attacks on education.

Article 5

Prioritise action and share expertise on resilience and recovery

The international community and governments everywhere shall prioritise efforts to increase the resilience and recovery of education systems and institutions subjected to attacks and share information on such efforts.

Article 6

Make education an agent for peace

Teachers, their unions, governments and the international community shall work to prevent education from aggravating conflict. They shall enable schools, colleges, universities and all other education institutions to become zones and agents of peace, promoting tolerance, understanding, conflict resolution, and respect for cultural and religious diversity both in their curricula and by fair, inclusive and transparent management in line with the 1966 and 1997 Recommendations concerning the Status respectively of Teachers and Higher Education Personnel.

Article 7

Support campaigns of solidarity

Teachers, their unions, non-governmental organisations and civil society are urged to join solidarity campaigns in support of victims of attacks and threats of attack, as a means to put pressure on governments and the international community to take action to end impunity; protect students, teachers, academics and all other education personnel; and make education institutions safe sanctuaries in which all students have equal opportunities to fulfil their individual potential and become advocates for peace in the world.



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A girl plays in the ruins of a school building in Yemen, 2020.
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Students learn how to protect themselves in case of attack, Israel, 2008.
© AP Photo / Ariel Schalit / Reporters.be



U.N. Brazilian peacekeeper stands guard as children wait outside a school, Haiti 2008
© AP Photo / Ariana Cubillos / Reporters.be

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Pakistani girls in a school supported by UNICEF at the
Katcha Garhi camp in Peshawar, Pakistan, 2008.
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Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.