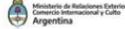




# 4<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

Abuja, NIGERIA 25-27 OCTOBER 2021



## “Ensuring Safe Education for All: From Commitment to Practice”

### Hybrid Event

### Abuja, Nigeria AND Online

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### Overview:

The Government of Nigeria, together with the Governments of Argentina, Norway, Spain, African Union Commission and the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack are hosting the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration. The Abuja conference is a biennial conference with the overarching aim of taking stock and reviewing progress in implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (Guidelines)*, as well as encouraging commitment and action in protecting education from attack. The Conference is a forum for states, and multilateral and civil society organizations, to exchange experiences and learning, and to present their strategies, progress, as well as challenges, in making the promise of safe education into a reality. The Conference is also an opportunity for states to hold each other to account for advancing their commitment to implement the SSD.

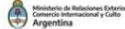
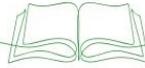
The SSD has now been embraced by well over half of all UN member states, with many having had six years to begin putting the Declaration commitments into practice. The central theme of the Abuja conference will therefore be identifying good practice in implementing key commitments in the Safe Schools Declaration and highlighting how this good practice can be strengthened and adapted to different contexts. The aim is to move beyond endorsement and expression of commitment to encourage states to accelerate implementation of the SSD.

While the Abuja Conference will have an international focus, as it is the first to be held on the African continent, and in a country and region severely affected by attacks on education, the experiences of Nigeria and the Sahel region in addressing attacks on education, will be highlighted. Promising practices



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by the African Union itself, as well as countries across the continent, and across the globe, will be drawn upon to facilitate a comparative perspective and cross-country and cross-regional learning and exchange.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for states to announce new endorsements and showcase progress in implementation, providing an impetus for states to join the SSD and strengthen implementation ahead of the Conference. Co-hosts and multi-lateral and civil society partners will mobilize to encourage states to take this action in the months preceding the Conference, including through demarches, and briefings with missions to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva and New York, and meetings with relevant ministries in capitals.

## Objectives:

**The overarching objective is to strengthen implementation of the SSD** by achieving the following specific objectives:

- 1) Share good practice in implementing key commitments in the Declaration to inspire other states to adapt the practice within their own context. In particular, share promising practice in achieving the following SSD commitments: a) Use the *Guidelines* and bring them into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate; b) Seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict; c) Investigate allegations of violations or applicable national and international law and, where appropriate, duly prosecute perpetrators; and d) Provide assistance to survivors.
- 2) Forge global cooperation and strengthen coordination in protecting education and deterring military use of schools and universities by bringing together education, defence, justice and foreign affairs ministries, and multilateral and civil society organizations, to discuss prevention and response measures.
- 3) Identify actions governments can take to better achieve accountability for attacks on education and justice for survivors, by building and strengthening international and national legal mechanisms.

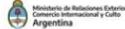
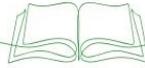
## Panels and Sessions:

**Panel 1: Use the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.** This panel will examine how the *Guidelines* have been used by states and the UN Department of



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Peacekeeping Operations to better protect education and save lives. Concrete examples of how military use of schools has been reduced as a result of implementing the *Guidelines* will be highlighted.

**Panel 2: Ensure continuity of safe education in zones of conflict.** This panel will highlight good practice in enabling safe education to continue during armed conflict. Distance learning and other alternative education programs utilized during the Covid 19 pandemic will be examined to explore how they might be applied to the context of attacks on education. In addition, the panel will consider how the SSD, by keeping schools safe, can be a tool to prevent other forms of grave violations, such as recruitment, sexual violence, and abductions, and how the SSD can better protect women and girls in conflict.

**Panel 3: The Way Forward: Investigating allegations of violations, prosecuting perpetrators, and providing assistance to survivors.** To achieve justice for survivors of attacks on education, perpetrators must be prosecuted but survivors must also receive services and support to enable them to recover. This panel will address how international and national legal systems can address both these elements of ensuring justice for persons and communities impacted by attacks on education, including through reparations.

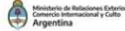
*In addition to the three panels there will be two sessions that will not focus on a particular commitment as the panels do, but instead consider the experiences of implementing the SSD more holistically, first from a military perspective, and second from a regional perspective:*

- **Session hosted by the Nigerian Ministry of Defence:** The Nigerian armed forces will explain how they are working to protect education in the North-East of Nigeria where schools are being targeted for attack by non-state armed groups. Other ministries of defence and armed forces will be invited to discuss their own experiences and challenges in preventing and responding to attacks on education.
- Session entitled **Reflections on Protecting Education from Attack in the Sahel:** This session will include representatives from relevant ministries and multilateral and civil society organizations involved in preventing and responding to attacks on education in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali. Speakers will present the challenges faced and lessons learned for countries in other regions to draw on.



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## **Format:**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Abuja Conference will be a hybrid event with in-person and virtual components to accommodate all participants. The Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) is responsible for adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols and will be providing guidance and ensure compliance for the duration of the conference.

## **Participation and Registration :**

Registration is open to government representatives of all UN member states, international organizations, civil society, and academia. Governments are kindly requested to nominate four (4) officials (one representative each from the Ministries of Education, Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Justice) to participate in the Conference.

All participants joining virtually are requested to register for the Conference by completing an online form [here](#). Government delegates who wish to participate in-person are requested to write directly to [nssc@education.gov.ng](mailto:nssc@education.gov.ng) and copy [safeschools@protectingeducation.org](mailto:safeschools@protectingeducation.org).

Further information will be available on the Conference website at [sdconference.education.gov.ng](http://sdconference.education.gov.ng)