



The need for schools in Afghanistan to be declared as zones of peace and neutrality

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NGOs and communities can work together to promote humane schools

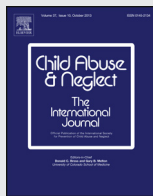
On October 9, 2012, Malala Yousafzai, a then 15-year-old Pakistani girl, was shot in the head and neck while returning home from school in an assassination attempt by Taliban gunmen. Malala was targeted because of her active role in advocating for the education of girls in areas ruled by Islamist militant groups.

Malala was brought to the United Kingdom for treatment and rehabilitation. She has since recovered, and with global recognition of her cause, she has grown stronger in her advocacy for worldwide access to education. Indeed,

the assassination attempt on Malala sparked a global outpouring of support for children's education, particularly for girls.

Despite remarkable progress by the international community to ensure universal access to education by 2015, a 2013 report by Save the Children stated that nearly 50 million primary and lower-secondary school-age children were out of school in conflict-affected countries, and more than half of these children were girls. The report also stated that the proportion of children out of school in conflict-affected countries has increased from 42% of the global total

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 DIRECTIONS

of out-of-school children in 2008 to 50% in 2011.

Malala has come to represent the growing dangers and struggles that millions of children living in conflict-affected countries face in accessing education. The vicious attack on Malala, however, is just one of many different strategies employed by armed opposition and criminal groups to intimidate and attack children's education. (The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack define *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.”) Schools, teachers, and students become collateral damage in conflicts, and sometimes they are targeted as a strategy to undermine the efforts of a government to further educational, social, and economic development or as a way to intimidate communities or groups of people (e.g., schoolgirls) who may not conform to the doctrines of an armed group.

The Afghan Context

In May 2013 the United Nations Security Council released a report on children and armed conflict. The report documented 167 attacks on education in 2012 in Afghanistan. These attacks included armed groups using improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers and the use of intimidation and threats against teachers and pupils as a strategy to force schools to close. The report also stipulated that the Taliban, despite repeatedly declaring their support of education, issued a letter in 2012 in which it opposed the education of girls and made threats toward girls who continued to attend school. A report produced by CARE

International and the Afghan Ministry of Education, which included a survey, showed that the majority of external threats and attacks to education come from armed opposition groups (42%) and armed criminal groups (39%).

Although Afghanistan has made remarkable progress in increasing children's access to education, particularly girl's education, and has seen the number of attacks on children's education steadily decline, the future of these advances remains insecure. The transition of security responsibility from international forces to the Afghan National Security Forces and the elections scheduled for April 2014 are occurring in a context of deteriorating security and an increase in activity of a range of armed opposition groups. All Afghans, including children, face a highly uncertain future.

This Study

Against this background and to align future child protection and education programs with the perspectives of local stakeholders, Save the Children commissioned a study of the factors preventing Afghan schools from being safe for education. The study was conducted in three of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan: Faryab, Nangarhar and Uruzgan.

Faryab Province is in northern Afghanistan and borders Turkmenistan. The Province is multi-ethnic, and multilingual. Nangarhar Province is to the east of the country and borders Pakistan. It consists primarily of ethnic Pashtuns. Uruzgan Province, also made up of mostly ethnic Pashtuns, is in the south of Afghanistan and is culturally and ethnically linked to Kandahar Province.

In May and June 2013, a team of 18 international and local researchers visited the three provinces and conducted structured and

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