

Protecting Educational Institutions

A Call to Action for International Educational Organizations

The universal right to education is a cornerstone of human progress and a fundamental pillar of a just and equitable world. This right, enshrined in numerous international conventions and declarations, empowers individuals, strengthens societies, and fuels innovation. Yet, this vital right is increasingly under threat, particularly for the most vulnerable among us: our children.

We gather today, united by a shared concern and an unwavering commitment to safeguarding the future, to address a grave and escalating crisis: the pervasive violence and conflict that plague educational institutions worldwide. The tragic loss of young lives at the Shajareh Tayebbeh School of Minab in Iran and attacks on Iranian universities stand as solemn and heart-wrenching reminders of the devastating impact of attacks on education. Such acts are not merely statistics; they represent shattered dreams, extinguished potential, and the profound grief of families and communities. These are not isolated incidents but symptoms of a global failure to protect the very spaces that should be sanctuaries of learning, peace, and hope.

The deliberate targeting of universities, schools, students, and educators is a reprehensible violation of international humanitarian law and a profound moral failing. Educational institutions are not military targets; they are sacred grounds for intellectual growth, the cultivation of critical thinking, and the development of the next generation of leaders, innovators, and peacemakers. To attack a school is to attack the future itself.

Therefore, we call for an immediate and unwavering global commitment to the protection of all educational institutions and our children and youth within them from violence and conflict. This commitment must translate into concrete actions by international organizations, national governments, and all parties to armed conflict.

We urge all parties to uphold and rigorously implement international laws and conventions that protect civilians, including children, and specifically prohibit the targeting of educational facilities. We envision a world where every girl and boy, regardless of their background or the circumstances of their birth, can pursue their education without fear. A world where the journey to school and university is safe, the classroom is a place of security and inspiration, and the pursuit of knowledge is never interrupted by violence. This is not an idealistic dream; it is an achievable imperative that requires collective political will and sustained dedication.

Educational institutions must be recognized and actively defended as zones of peace. They are incubators of understanding, empathy, and tolerance. By protecting schools and universities, we are not only safeguarding lives but also fostering the very values that can dismantle cycles of violence and build lasting peace.

We call for:

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement:** Governments must enact and enforce national legislation that criminalizes attacks on educational institutions and personnel, aligning their domestic laws with international humanitarian and human rights law. International bodies must hold accountable those who violate these protections.
- **Enhanced Monitoring and Reporting:** Robust mechanisms are needed to monitor and document attacks on universities, schools, ensuring that perpetrators are identified and brought to justice. Transparency and accountability are paramount.
- **Promoting Education as a Tool for Peace:** Educational curricula should actively promote peace, conflict resolution, human rights, and tolerance. Schools and universities can and should be centers for dialogue and reconciliation.
- **Investing in University and School Safety and Security:** Practical measures must be implemented to enhance the physical security of universities and schools in conflict-affected areas, including reinforced structures, safe access routes, and training for educators and students on emergency preparedness.
- **Providing Support to Affected Children and Educators:** Comprehensive psychosocial support and educational assistance must be provided to children and educators who have experienced violence or displacement, helping them to heal and resume their learning.
- **Mobilizing Global Political Will:** International organizations and global leaders must consistently advocate for the protection of education, placing it at the forefront of diplomatic agendas and humanitarian efforts.
- **Raising Public Awareness:** Global campaigns are essential to highlight the importance of protecting schools and to mobilize public support for this critical cause.

The future of our world depends on the education we provide to our children and our youth today. Let the memory of the lives lost at Shajareh Tayebbeh School of Minab galvanize us into action. Let us commit to a world where every classroom is a beacon of hope, every student is safe to learn, and every educational institution stands as an unassailable sanctuary for progress and peace. The time for collective action is now. Let us work together to ensure that education, the most powerful weapon we have to change the world, remains a protected and cherished right for all.

Respectfully,

Faezeh Arkan, PhD.

Director of International Scientific Collaboration Office, Hazrat-e Masoumeh University (HMU), Qom, Iran