



# —WE DO NOT WANT TO BE SCARED ANY LONGER



Save the Children

**Children's manifesto presented at the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration**

Abuja Conference, October 2021

This manifesto is written by children who took part in consultations in 2021 with Save the Children to discuss a key issue to them; safe education. The 300 children in 10 countries, in turn, represent millions of children caught in conflict and the threat of violence and harassment, being denied their basic right to education.

# CHILDREN'S MANIFESTO

## – Safe Schools Declaration

**Children are the future of our world, and we are very worried about what is happening in it now. Many economic, environmental and conflict related challenges affect our lives and us. However, we are ready and willing to support decision-makers striving to improve children's rights, including our rights to quality education, protection from all forms of violence and freedom during war.**

One key issue for us is safe education. We are glad that this problem is being addressed not only by adults, but also by us – children.

What does safe education mean to us? Friends, safety, learning without limitations, positive emotions. But, unfortunately, in the realities of our world today, many children do not experience this reality.

We must ensure that children from all over the world have an opportunity to speak about the problems caused by conflict. We must ensure that their voices are heard.

Children of Burkina Faso, Colombia, Guatemala, Mali, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine, Ukraine and Yemen, as well as children from other countries, have suffered from violence and conflict.

### CHILDREN ARE SCARED

**Children are scared** – when military equipment passes outside the windows of their schools or houses, and when they hear the sounds of explosions and gunfire.

**Children are scared** – when educational institutions are used for military purposes, subjecting young boys and girls, teachers and technical staff at school to constant danger.

**Children are scared** – when military people attack children in the middle of the street; when the personal belongings of boys and girls are taken away and they are persecuted and, in some cases, even killed.

**Children are scared** – when young people are recruited into armed groups and involved in hostilities.

**Children are scared** – when armies come to schools, arrest children or fire live or rubber bullets at them and when tear gas is used.

**Children are scared** – when there are no shelters in their schools or when they are not big enough to protect everyone.

**Children are scared** – when there are no police guarding their schools, while armed people freely walk into schoolyards and buildings.

All this strikes terror into sensitive children's hearts.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Faced with these problems we want to share with you, our recommendations:

- 1 Ensure that children can get to and from their schools safely. Some things that can be done to do this are:
  - Improve the roads used by the children to get to school and maintain them so that children are not harmed.
  - Provide safe transportation for children to and from school. Do not allow armies to inspect children. End the long delays caused by checkpoints. Ensure children are safe from recruitment along the way.
  - Ensure the paths that children travel are safe, that they are free of mines and explosives and that they do not cross where armed groups or military bases or checkpoints are located.
- 2 Have authorized civilian security personnel, who are not part of the armed conflict, guard educational facilities and check that there is no danger to children, such as mines or explosives near or inside schools. Check frequently before school starts so that children are not afraid to go to school.
- 3 Promote spaces for dialogue between the government and groups involved in the armed conflict. Generate agreements to ensure children and schools cannot be involved in the conflicts. Emphasize that schools must be protected and children must be kept away from attacks.
- 4 Parties to the conflict must think of us children, our future and the future of the country. Lay down your weapons and make peace. We want peace so that we can return back to our villages and schools.
- 5 Prevent external personnel from entering and harming students or any school personnel through identity registration and identity cards that would be used upon entering the institutions.

- 6 Governments should help low-income educational institutions to have all the equipment they need to teach their classes. This can make classes more fun and motivating for children to continue studying. Some children think that classes are boring and leave their studies and risk being recruited.
- 7 Governments should install metal detectors in schools to prevent armed people from entering the institution and harming teachers, students or any staff.
- 8 Hold meetings in educational institutions where children can express their problems, concerns and proposals to make schools safer.
- 9 Provide quality education that allows children to complete their full education cycle close to home, including children who live in rural areas. If children need to leave their communities to complete their education, they are more prone to give up school and this can make them more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.
- 10 Ensure that the resources that are earmarked for education are not diverted and fall into criminal or corrupt hands so that education is truly protected.
- 11 Governments must help children who have been victims of war with professional psychological support to help them overcome the traumas left by the conflict.

### CALL TO ACTION

All these recommendations should be implemented without discrimination of any kind, whether on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion or disability.

We want to make a call to action to all the countries of the world.

The Safe Schools Declaration is very important because it makes us feel protected. All states that have not signed on to the declaration should do so.

We do not want to be scared any longer. We want to feel safe and stop worrying about ourselves, our family members and our friends.

To the countries that have already signed the Safe Schools Declaration, we would like to thank you for trying to keep children's education and their schools safe, and we hope that you will continue to do so and invite other countries to sign this Declaration so that schools will be totally safe.

This is the message children of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Guatemala, Ukraine, Colombia, Mexico, Palestine and Yemen want to share.