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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, and Salesian Missions, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).



Statement

Educational emergencies

“Even if they have never seen a gun, millions of children suffer from wars, as resources that could have been invested in development are diverted into armaments. Indeed, one of the most distressing realities of our time is that most wars have been fought in precisely those countries that could least afford them” (United Nations Children’s Fund, *The State of the World’s Children 1996*).

Education is critical for all children, but it is especially urgent for the hundreds of millions of children affected by emergencies due to conflicts or natural disasters. Yet, for millions of children affected by disaster and crisis, the right to education remains an unfulfilled promise: given that 50 per cent of out-of-school children are in conflict situations and that an estimated 175 million children per year are impacted by situations of natural disaster during the current decade, this is the most important group to target to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

Attacks on students, educators and educational institutions have a devastating impact on access to education and educational systems and on a society’s overall development in the long term. Students and educators are killed, injured or traumatized. Education buildings, administrative infrastructure and classroom materials are damaged or destroyed. As a result, there is:

- Decline in attendance: students and educators miss class or stop going to school altogether; student enrolments decline.
- Teacher flight and decline in education quality: educators often refuse to work in unsafe environments, leaving teachers who remain stretched thin, with their performance impaired. Teachers lose their jobs and livelihoods, reducing the pool of qualified teachers for some time.
- Temporary or permanent school closure: constant threats lead to the shutdown of the educational institutions in areas where violence is widespread and perpetrators go unpunished. Following that, the institutions in surrounding areas also close out of fear.
- Disproportionate impact on girls and excluded groups: girls and women are disproportionately affected by conflict when their right to education is opposed; they are targeted for sexual violence while at or on the way to educational institutions.

The use of educational institutions by the military and armed groups during situations of conflict and insecurity can disrupt or completely deny education both immediately and in the long term.

In post-conflict situations, the reconstruction of educational systems is often slow, affecting access to all levels of education, including secondary and tertiary education, which is crucial for developing the skilled workforce needed for post-crisis renewal and national development.

Recommendations

In order to guarantee that children and youth have access to safe, quality and relevant education in all situations, we strongly recommend that the international

community take immediate action to plan, prioritize and protect education in humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations. Therefore, we recommend that States:

- Ensure that schools remain safe spaces for learning by taking action to stop schools and universities from being used for military purposes, including promoting the implementation of the Draft Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.
- Provide children and youth impacted by armed conflict with immediate and professional assistance for their psychological, social and spiritual needs in order to bring back peace and serenity.
- Create new international initiatives using electronic and satellite communication technologies to serve as vehicles for providing educational services to crisis-affected and post-conflict areas.
- Provide incentives, fix school hours to make them convenient, provide sanitary materials and school clothes for young girls and make nursery schools and preschools available in order to free young girls from childcare duties so they can attend schools.
- Increase levels of humanitarian aid to education and improve its delivery mechanisms by enhancing humanitarian funding allocations to meet educational needs and monitoring aid so that it reaches affected children and youth.
- Ensure that education is included in all humanitarian action plans and national strategies to respond holistically to children and youth in educational emergencies.
