

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
3 September 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 1 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of September 2020, the Niger intends to organize an open debate on the theme “Children and armed conflict: attacks against schools as a grave violation of children’s rights” to be held on Thursday, 10 September 2020 at 10 a.m.

In order to guide the discussions on this topic, the Niger has prepared and attached a concept note (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Abdou **Abarry**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 1 September 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: French]

Concept note for the open debate of the Security Council on 10 September 2020 on children and armed conflict, on the theme “Children and armed conflict: attacks against schools as a grave violation of children’s rights”

I. Introduction

1. During its presidency of the Security Council, the Republic of the Niger proposes the organization of an open debate on the fate of children in armed conflict, with a focus on terrorist attacks against schools. The debate will be held in anticipation of the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#) and on the sidelines of the first International Day to Protect Education from Attack, proclaimed for 9 September 2020. This year also marks the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration, of which 104 countries are signatories. The debate will provide an opportunity to focus on the progress made in the implementation of resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#) and subsequent related resolutions on the protection of schools and related protected persons from attacks and threats of attacks in situations of armed conflict. During the debate, particular attention will be paid to attacks against schools in the central Sahel region, where terrorist and non-State armed groups are increasingly attacking schools as a marker of their destructive ideology.

II. Background

2. Nine years after the adoption of resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#), in July 2011, followed by the related resolutions [2143 \(2014\)](#), [2225 \(2015\)](#) and [2427 \(2018\)](#), significant progress has been made on the issue of attacks and threats of attacks against schools and/or hospitals and related protected persons, and on the issue of respect for the civilian character of schools. Attacks against schools and/or hospitals in situations of armed conflict constitute one of the six grave violations against children. Through these resolutions, the Council highlights the particular consequences and impact of attacks against schools in terms of the security, education and well-being of children in armed conflict. In resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#), it gave the United Nations a mandate to identify and list, in the annexes to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, cases of attacks against schools, in accordance with the principles set out in resolution [1612 \(2005\)](#). In resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#) and the subsequent related resolutions, the Council also called for measures to ensure that schools and hospitals are spared and protected in situations of armed conflict and that the parties listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict cease rights violations and other abuses against children.

3. Despite those landmark resolutions, terrorist attacks and threats of attacks by non-State armed groups against schools are growing at an alarming rate. In the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict ([S/2020/525](#)), issued in June 2020, the United Nations verified 927 attacks, 494 against schools and 433 against hospitals, including against educational and medical personnel, between January and December 2019. In the Sahel region, the security situation and terrorist attacks have a disproportionate effect on children. More than 3,300 schools have been

closed owing to insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, a significant increase compared to the number of schools closed or rendered inoperative since 2017.¹ These attacks and threats of attacks on schools have disrupted the education of more than 650,000 children in the three central Sahelian countries, and more than 16,000 teachers are also unable to work as a result of the violence. In some areas affected by security crises, terrorist groups specifically target schoolgirls, who are forcibly abducted and subjected to sexual violence and other forms of abuse, for example in Chibok and Dapchi, Nigeria.² These attacks and threats of attacks on schools by non-State armed groups have led to thousands of children dropping out of school, with particular consequences for girls, who are more vulnerable to early and/or forced marriage when not in school.³ Worldwide, the education of 75 million children and adolescents is disrupted by conflict or security crises in 35 conflict-affected countries.⁴

4. Attacks and threats of attacks against schools by non-State armed groups also undermine progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal related to universal access to quality education by 2030. Schools play a crucial role in the development of children, but are often threatened, affected and damaged by targeted, violent attacks. The Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Henrietta Fore, has stated that, when children miss school, especially in times of conflict, they are not only unable to acquire the skills needed to build prosperous and peaceful communities but also become vulnerable to horrific forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse and forced recruitment into armed groups.

5. In its resolution 2532 (2020), the Council reaffirmed the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reiterated that call, emphasizing the disproportionate negative impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children, particularly the most vulnerable in conflict-affected areas. Almost 23.8 million children and adolescents are at risk of not returning to school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and children affected by conflict and security crises are the most vulnerable.⁵

6. In a world of growing security threats and multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the surest ways to achieve sustainable peace is to ensure equal access to quality education for all girls and boys, including the most vulnerable, such as refugees, internally displaced children, children with disabilities, and children who are affected by and separated from conflict and are receiving reintegration assistance. The debate will be an opportunity to discuss ways and means of protecting schools against attacks and threats of attacks by non-State armed groups and to ensure inclusive, equitable and equal access to quality education for all children.

III. Objective and discussion questions

7. The open debate will provide an opportunity to discuss ways of strengthening the protection of schools and protected persons in relation to schools from attacks and threats of attacks and to ensure inclusive, equitable and equal access to quality education for all children affected by armed conflict. Member States are invited to

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, "Crisis in the central Sahel", advocacy brief, January 2020. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/central-sahel-advocacy-brief-2020>.

² Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "'I will never go back to school': the impact of attacks on education for Nigerian women and girls", October 2018.

³ United Nations, "Policy brief: education during COVID-19 and beyond", August 2020.

⁴ Education Cannot Wait, "Stronger together in crises: 2019 annual results report", June 2020.

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school?", July 2020.

highlight lessons learned and good practices in responding to attacks against schools and to discuss approaches to strengthen national, regional and international efforts.

8. The following questions will guide the debate:

- How can Member States and the Security Council put in place and/or strengthen measures to ensure the systematic and effective implementation of resolution [1998 \(2011\)](#) and related resolutions? What measures and practices can Member States implement to better prevent attacks and threats of attacks against schools and protected persons in armed conflict and regions affected by security crises?
- How can the support of United Nations entities to States be strengthened in order to curb terrorist attacks against schools?
- What steps can be taken to better support the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict and address pre-existing and emerging challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? How can the monitoring and reporting mechanism be further strengthened to capture the regional and subregional dynamics of armed conflicts with regard to children? How could data be further disaggregated to ensure more comprehensive collection and dissemination of information on attacks and threats of attacks against schools and protected persons?
- What measures can be taken to ensure effective educational and psychosocial care for children whose schools have been affected by terrorist attacks? What are the existing mechanisms and how can they be made more effective? How can Member States ensure that children in vulnerable situations, including refugees, displaced persons and children affected by or separated from conflict, who are receiving reintegration assistance, also obtain equal access to education?
- What are the barriers and challenges to the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration and its effective implementation? How can they be addressed in each context?
- In view of the global challenge posed by the issue of terrorism and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, how can funding mechanisms be strengthened for more effective prevention of attacks on schools and for the rehabilitation of schools that have suffered attacks and received threats of attacks?

IV. Format of the meeting

9. The meeting will take the form of an open debate of the Security Council and will be chaired by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry. Member States and observers are invited to submit a written statement of approximately 500 words. Statements sent by 11 September 2020 will be included in a compilation document.

V. Briefers

10. The following speakers will brief the Council:

- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- The Executive Director of UNICEF
- A representative of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack
- A civil society representative

VI. Expected results

11. The Niger and Belgium, as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, will propose the adoption of a statement by the President of the Security Council on the issue, in support of existing resolutions and presidential statements, in which the need to protect schools and related protected persons from attacks and threats of attacks is underlined.
