Press Release in the International Day to Protect Education from Attack

Education in the Arab Region is suffering under conflicts, wars, and pandemics

In its seventy-four session, the UN General Assembly declared 9th of September of each year as the International Day to Protect Education from Attacks. This resolution affirms the right to education for all and the importance of ensuring safe and enabling learning environments in situations of humanitarian emergencies, conflicts, wars, and pandemics, including the global Covid-19 pandemic.

This day comes to mobilize international support to ensure the accountability for the ongoing and intentional attacks on education, and the armed violence that children suffer from around the world. The celebration of this day aims to raise awareness about the children’s suffering from armed conflict, and their urgent need for educational support. This day is an annual platform for the international community to review progress and new data, and to be committed to effective mechanisms to hold the perpetrators of these attacks accountable, and put an end to their impunity.

As the efforts of governments continue to confront the multi-faceted impact of Covid-19 crisis, which at its climax led to the closure of schools on a global scale in 191 countries, and depriving nearly 1.6 billion learners from going to their universities, schools and educational institutions. This day is a clear message about the importance of protecting schools considering it a safe haven to protect students and teachers. Moreover, it emphasize on the need to place the protection of education during crises at the top of the global agenda to reduce the widening of educational gaps that would increase the risk of crises and insecurity under difficult circumstances.

On this important day, and in the midst of the repercussions of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Arab Campaign for Education for All (ACEA) and its partners confirm that it has become very important to ensure the non-spread of armed conflicts and illiteracy that were rampant before. The challenge facing the international community now is the ability to provide education for all by moving from political will to a real change on the ground.

ACEA and its partners stressed on the urgent need to stop the attacks on schools and to hold the perpetrators of these heinous attacks accountable, so that millions of children deprived of education in conflict zones can aspire to a better future. The UN Secretary-General stated repeatedly in his statements, “Education is the foundation of the children lives, we must protect it, and ensure safe environment for our children to continue their education and acquire the skills they need for the future”

ACEA and its partners affirm that education provides stability and hope for a better future for all children who are at risk of conflict, as confirmed by the President of the UN General Assembly Tijani Muhammad Pandey in his statements on this day. He said, “Every year of education for a child, reduces the risk of their participation in the conflict by 20%, joint efforts must be made - especially in the fight against Covid-19 - to ensure children have equal access to quality education, warning that “failure to do so will be tantamount to failing a generation.”
ACEA invites its members in the Arab coalitions, networks, civil society organizations, governments and the private sector to celebrate the International Day in an appropriate manner. In addition, to extend bridges of cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) considering these two bodies the entrusted to prepare for this annual celebration. ACEA sees that the cost of all related activities should be covered by international organizations donations received from governments.

ACEA and its partners consider this day as an opportunity to shed light on the suffering of more than 75 million children between the ages of 3 and 18 in 35 countries who are in urgent need for educational support due to their exposure to various crises.

ACEA and its partners affirm that governments must bear the responsibility to provide protection and ensure quality, and inclusive education for all learners at all levels, especially those in critical conditions. ACEA stresses on the need to intensify efforts in this regard and increase the allocated fund to promote a safe and immune school environment during humanitarian emergencies, by taking all possible measures to protect schools, learners and educational staff from attacks, refraining from measures that hinder children’s access to education, and facilitating access to education in situations of armed conflict.

ACEA and its partners call for action to stop attack on education in the Arab region and the whole world. According to the data of the “Education under Attack 2020” report issued by the Global Alliance to Protect Education from Attack, more than 22,000 students, teachers and academics of various levels were injured or killed in more than 11,000 attacks in 93 countries over the past five years. Although the number of attacks was slightly less than the 12,700 recorded in the coalition’s previous report, covering the years 2013 to 2017, but the number of countries that reported incidents increased from 74 in the previous period to 93 countries.

ACEA and its partners believe that there is an urgent need to address the causes of attack on education, which takes various forms like political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic or religious reasons. In some cases, attackers have used explosive weapons, arson, or firing at school or university facilities. In other cases, attackers directly target students and education personnel with force or the threat of force, including sexual violence.

Armed forces, law enforcement agencies, other state security entities, and non-state armed groups also use schools and universities for military purposes, or use schools to recruit children into their groups. These attacks have devastating effects on human life, educational systems, and long-term on peace and development.

ACEA and its partners confirm that the Arab region is a blatant example of attack on education. During the past five years, the region has been a hotbed of attacks that affected basic education and higher education, Yemen for example has suffered the most violence, according to the report “Education Under Attack 2020”. Between 2015 and 2019, Yemen witnessed an average of one attack on education every day, and just over 2,000 incidents in the past five years. Out of 300 attacks on higher education facilities in the world, 130 attacks were on Yemeni university facilities, “often due to shelling, explosives, or air strikes”.

Syria also witnessed many attacks on education. According to the "Education Under Attack 2020" report, about 400 attacks on education were monitored between the years 2017-2020, and about 40% of Syrian
schools were damaged as a result of the ongoing conflict there. Most of these attacks and damages were the result of bombing with barrel bombs by the government forces.

Moreover, university students and professors have been targeted in a number of Arab countries, usually after speaking or protesting against government policies. Targeting universities was particularly clear in the Arab region, as two-thirds of the attacks on university buildings occurred in the Middle East of the total attacks globally. For example, in Iraq parts of the historic building of University of Mosul were destroyed, in Syria also the old building of the University of Aleppo was bombed, in all cases there is no clear accountability for identifying the perpetrators. This was an encouraging factor to attack education more and more in conflict areas.

Only in Iraq, during the period 2017-2019, more than 160 attack on schools. The United Nations reports also monitored 79 schools in Kirkuk governorate were attacked for military purposes between 2015-2017, and the mines planted on school and university roads remained a real danger to the educational process. According to United Nations sources, a third of Iraqi schools contained unexploded munitions or explosive remnants of conflict.

In 2019, in Libya, the International Coalition monitored at least 14 attacks on schools as a result of the conflict there; the fighting around Tripoli and some Libyan villages during 2019 and 2020 resulted in severe damage to schools. These events also prevented children from going to school, the Coordination Office for Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations reported that about 115,000 children were directly affected by these various attacks.

In Palestine, the situation is not better than other Arab regions, as there were about 100 attacks on schools repeatedly between 2017 and 2019, as a result of repeated attacks by the Israeli occupation forces and Israeli settlers. The report "Education under Attack 2020" stated that the Israeli air strikes in Gaza damaged more than 35 schools between 2017 and 2019, and the result of all these events affected more than 27,000 Palestinian students.

In Somalia, the "Education Under Attack 2020" report, between the years 2017-2019, monitored no less than 140 attacks on education targeting schools, threats against education personnel, proximity of military bases to schools, and interference in the education curriculum by parties. Litigating, child recruitment into armed groups, and other forms of attack on education.

In Sudan, during the period covered by the "Education Under Attack 2020" report, no less than 20 reports of attacks on Sudanese schools between 2017-2019 were monitored, as a result of the conflicts, especially Darfur, and a state of political instability due to change and transfer of political power in Sudan is a new challenge for education in Sudan.

Recently, Lebanon witnessed unfortunate events. On August 4, 2020, Beirut was struck by an unexpected disaster. The port of Beirut, which is considered one of the most important ports on the shores of the Mediterranean, disappeared due to a huge explosion, which is the second largest explosion after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This explosion to date has generated more than 170 dead, more than 6,000 wounded, dozens of missing, hundreds of thousands displaced, and economic losses estimated between 10-15 billion US dollars. The
explosion also damaged 160 schools, in addition to about 80,000 students who need urgent and emergency support as a result of this disaster.

ACEA and its partners confirm that, in light of all these dangerous facts, attacks on education not only kill or injure students and teachers as individuals, but also affect societies for years. With destruction for buildings and educational materials, students and teachers are living in fear, schools and universities are forced to close, and some students do not complete their education, which hinders the development process in the long term.

Eventually, ACEA and its partners invite all Arab civil society organizations to participate in its campaign on this day under the slogan (#Stop_Attack_On_Education), which will be launched on September 9th. The campaign will include a group of national and regional events that highlight the attack on education, how can we protect the right to education, and raise our voice loudly to all those who violate this right to say "Stop."

ACEA Secretariat

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