



**Human Rights Watch Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child
In advance of its Adoption of the List of Issues for Bhutan
80th pre-session
*June 2021***

Protection of Education from Attack (Article 28)

In its 2017 concluding observations on Bhutan’s report under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, this Committee “recommend[ed] that [Bhutan] endorses the [Safe Schools] Declaration as a commitment to protect students, educational staff and infrastructure during armed conflict, particularly relevant in the context of the State party’s participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations.”¹ The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express political support for the protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict²; the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflict; and the implementation of the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.³ As of June 2021, 109 countries have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Bhutan has yet to endorse this important declaration.

As of April 2021, Bhutan was contributing 34 military staff officers, experts, and police to UN peacekeeping operations around the world. The 2017 Child Protection Policy of the UN Department of Peace Operations, Department of Field Support, and Department of Political Affairs notes:

United Nations peace operations should refrain from all actions that impede children’s access to education, including the use of school premises. This applies particularly to uniformed personnel. Furthermore ...

¹ Concluding observations on the report submitted by the Kingdom of Bhutan under article 8, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, CRC/C/OPAC/BTN/CO/1, June 2, 2017, para. 11.

² Safe Schools Declaration, May 28, 2015, https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf (accessed January 23, 2020).

³ Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, March 18, 2014, http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf (accessed January 23, 2020).

United Nations peace operations personnel shall at no time and for no amount of time use schools for military purposes.⁴

Bhutan's peacekeeping staff are currently deployed in the Central African Republic and Mali — both countries where attacks on students and schools, and the military use of schools by local parties has been documented as a problem.⁵

Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee ask the government of Bhutan:

- Why has the government of Bhutan not endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration?
- Are explicit protections for schools or universities from military use included in any policies, rules, or trainings for the Royal Bhutan Army?

⁴ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Field Support and Department of Political Affairs, "Child Protection in UN Peace Operations (Policy)," June 2017.

⁵ Education Under Attack: 2020, The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2020, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf