

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Ref.: AL ISR 11/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

20 July 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the right to education; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order and Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20, 53/7, 53/4, 57/7 and 58/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning regarding the bombing of a girls' school in Minab on 28 February 2026 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which resulted in the killing of at least 168 persons, almost all of them women and girls. We have also received information concerning continued airstrikes beginning with attacks by the United States and Israel on 28 February 2026, which reportedly resulted in the killing of thousands of civilians, including women and girls, the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, and the exposure of civilians to potentially hazardous substances. These allegations raise serious concerns under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, particularly with regard to the protection of civilians, including women and girls, the protection of schools and medical facilities, and the obligation to investigate attacks involving civilian casualties.

According to the information received:

Attacks, killings of civilians, destruction of essential infrastructure and possible exposure to hazardous substances

On 28 February 2026, Israel and the United States launched joint military attacks on Iran, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of civilians, as well as damage to schools, hospitals, energy facilities, housing, and other essential civilian infrastructure. It is reported that from 28 February to 6 April, at least 3,375 civilians have been killed, including 496 women, and the Iranian Ministry of Health reported more than 33,806 injuries. A total of 26 attacks on health care from 28 February to 4 April 2026, resulting in the deaths of 11 health care workers, have allegedly been verified by the World Health Organization.¹ Four rescue workers of the Iranian Red Crescent Society have been reported killed and more than 60 injured. Educational facilities reportedly sustained severe

¹ <https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/eha/ME-Sitrep-15-2-June-26.pdf>

damage with 1,726 educational and affiliated facilities affected, including 1,507 schools.²

Based on the information received, the Pasteur Institute, collaborating with the World Health Organization, sustained significant damage and was rendered unable to continue delivering health services. It is reported that Delaram Sina Psychiatric Hospital was also hit by a strike on 29 March, and the Tofigh Daru pharmaceutical facility, which produced medicines for treating cancer and multiple sclerosis, was damaged in another attack on 31 March.³ Hospital patients in Iran, including women and girls, were reportedly forced to leave hospitals, and even newborns requiring lifesaving equipment were evacuated from the neonatal unit in Bushehr under urgent conditions.⁴ As a result of joint United States and Israeli aggression, the achievements in reducing maternal mortality and the gains in girls' education are likely to be reversed.⁵

The orphanage in Fardis, west of Tehran, was allegedly struck, resulting in the killing of two people and injuring five.⁶ Missile strikes reportedly affected roadside service areas along the Zanzan–Qazvin highway, resulting in civilian casualties. Reports also indicate damage to public recreational spaces and sports facilities, including parts of the Azadi Sports Complex in Tehran. An attack on a sports facility in Lamerd in Fars Province on 28 February allegedly resulted in the death of 20 people, including female volleyball players and children.⁷

Moreover, Iran's Red Crescent Society reportedly warned residents of Tehran and surrounding areas that rainfall following the strikes could be "highly dangerous and acidic" and could cause "chemical burns of the skin and serious damage to the lungs." Residents reportedly referred to "black rain" and described the air as "unbreathable."⁸

Strike on the school in Minab and the killing of 168 persons, mostly girls

Amid the 28 February airstrikes across Iran, the school in Minab, attended mostly by girls between 7 and 12 years old, was struck by a missile during school hours while classes were underway. While the school had allegedly decided to close soon after the airstrikes began, parents were not able to reach their children before the airstrike landed on the compound. The building was reportedly hit by two strikes, with the second missile killing sheltering survivors.

The school allegedly bore visible markers of being an educational facility, including playing fields and colorful wall murals visible in satellite imagery. It is reported that while the school was located in proximity to a military

² <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/iran-islamic-republic/islamic-republic-iran-humanitarian-update-no-05-31-may-2026>

³ <https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/eha/ME-Sitrep-4-2-April-26.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/video/newsfeed/2026/3/3/babies-evacuated-from-iranian-hospital-damaged-in-us-israeli-strikes>

⁵ A/HRC/62/49, par. 31.

⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2026/03/30/world/live-news/iran-war-us-israel-trump?post-id=cmnczcpxd0000396wulimo0e8>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/29/world/middleeast/us-precision-strike-missile-iran-lamerd.html>

⁸ <https://time.com/7383099/iran-news-oil-strikes-tehran/>

installation, it was physically completely separated from that facility as it had independent walls, a separate entrance, and full isolation from the adjacent location. Allegedly, no evidence that would indicate that the school was being used for military purposes was found.⁹ Graphic footage and photographs circulating online reportedly show collapsed classrooms, damaged school furniture, and children's schoolbags scattered among debris, with the bodies of girls trapped under the rubble. Reportedly, 168 girls and teachers were killed, and many more were injured, leaving their families bereaved.¹⁰

Alleged investigations and contradicting statements

The United States initially announced an investigation into the bombing, with state representatives emphasizing the importance of protecting civilians. On 4 March, the Secretary of State, Mr. Marco Rubio, said that the Department of Defense and the Pentagon were investigating whether the airstrike was fired by the US and added that the US “would not deliberately target a school”.¹¹ On 7 March, President Donald Trump stated that he believed the strike was “done by Iran”, without, however, providing any evidence to support his claim.¹² On 8 March, Mr. Michael Waltz, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, in conversation with a news station, said that he would “leave that to the investigators to determine” but added that while “the United States does everything it can to avoid civilian casualties,” still, “sometimes, “of course, tragic mistakes occur.”¹³ On 9 March, President Trump, when asked again about the investigation said that “whatever the report shows, I'm willing to live with that report.”¹⁴

Israeli officials also claimed that they were investigating the “incident,” with Israel Defense Forces spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani, stating that they did not know who was responsible for the airstrike. It is reported that Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid, in an interview with the Russian TV channel, referring to the school bombing, stated that they “did this by mistake,” but later clarified that he did not take responsibility for the attack on Israel's behalf.¹⁵

On 8 March 2026, the Mehr News Agency released a video, which allegedly shows a Tomahawk cruise missile striking a naval base beside the school on 28 February. It is reported that the U.S. military is the only force involved in the conflict that uses Tomahawk missiles. According to the reports, a strike occurred at the same time as attacks on the naval base operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

⁹ Report. The 11:30 Crime; the Minab Wound. An Analysis of the Legal and Human Rights Dimensions of the Criminal Attack by the United States on Shajareh Tayyebah Primary School, Minab, on Saturday, 28 February 2026. With Accompanying Information on the School's Martyrs. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Office of the Deputy for Legal and International Affairs.

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/03/iran-un-experts-call-de-escalation-and-accountability> A/HRC/62/49, par. 48.

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/04/pete-hegseth-denies-responsibility-iran-school-strike>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/08/world/middleeast/iran-minab-school-strike.html>

¹³ <https://abcnews.com/Politics/week-transcript-3-8-26-us-ambassador-mike/story?id=130865780>

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/shorts/c8cT7_vIRco

¹⁵ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/r1myl2etbg>

To date, no outcomes of the investigation and no timeline for the release of findings have been announced. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for the process to be concluded as soon as possible and for the findings to be made public.¹⁶

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we have to express our concern regarding the serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the United States and Israel, in the context of the military attacks against Iran, including the reported killing of civilians, a large number of whom are women and girls, the destruction of civilian infrastructure together with reported exposure to hazardous substances, and the alleged strike on a girls' school during school hours, resulting in their death under the rubble.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure frequently has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, who bear primary responsibility for caregiving within families and communities. The disruption or destruction of medical facilities severely affects access to maternal and reproductive health care services, including emergency obstetric care, prenatal and postnatal services, and care for newborns. Particularly alarming are reports concerning the urgent evacuation of patients, including newborn infants requiring life-saving equipment, which may put their lives and health directly at risk.

In this regard, we wish to recall that under international humanitarian law, medical units and hospitals must be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack, as reflected in the Geneva Conventions and customary international law. The destruction or disabling of objects indispensable to the survival and well-being of the civilian population, in the present case including healthcare, housing and energy facilities, may also interfere with the enjoyment of several human rights, including the rights to health, housing and an adequate standard of living as protected, *inter alia*, under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Women are entitled to special protection in situations of armed conflict, including in relation to maternity and health care.

Reported exposure to toxic substances in air, water, or soil may have especially harmful effects on women and girls. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to environmental contaminants, which have been associated with adverse birth outcomes, including miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight and developmental complications. Girls who breathe more rapidly than adults and so absorb more pollutants into their smaller and less developed airways are also at heightened risk. Such exposure, if it were expected to cause disproportionate harm to civilians, or widespread, long-term and severe damage to the environment, is prohibited by customary international law (ICRC, IHL rules 43-45).

Extremely alarming are the reports of the bombing of the school in Minab, resulting in the killing of 168 persons, mostly girls, and concerns regarding whether it is being effectively and independently investigated. Schools are civilian objects and enjoy protection under international humanitarian law. The principle of distinction requires parties to an armed conflict to distinguish at all times between civilians and

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2026/03/turk-statement-protection-children-and-educational-institutions>

combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives, categorically prohibiting deliberate, indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks against civilians. Violations of these principles appear even more flagrant if the victims are girls receiving education at the time of the attack. Children are entitled to special protection during armed conflict and States must respect and ensure the right to education as protected under international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

We also take note of the public statements by officials indicating that investigations would be conducted into the circumstances of the strike. We wish to recall that when there are credible allegations that civilians have been killed or civilian objects such as schools have been struck, States are required to conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations capable of establishing the facts and determining responsibility.

We must emphasize that this duty to investigate and establish responsibility for the act does not diminish when attacks resulting in the death of civilians, including women and girls, are characterized as not “targeted” or “deliberate,” but rather as a “mistake.” International humanitarian law requires commanders to do “everything feasible” to verify that the objectives to be attacked are neither civilians nor civilian objects (ICRC Customary IHL rule 16) and provides that serious violations of these obligations may constitute grave breaches and war crimes (rule 156). As the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia observed, “the notion of ‘willfully’ incorporates the concept of recklessness” (Prosecutor v. Stanislav Galić, case No. IT-98-29-T). Accordingly, acts involving grave omissions or a failure to exercise due diligence, which lead to the killing of girls, may still constitute war crimes under international criminal law and international humanitarian law. Independently, it is also necessary to determine whether the attack involved the intent to cause mass civilian casualties.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.

Please provide detailed information on the measures taken to verify and ensure compliance with the principles of necessity, distinction, and precaution under international humanitarian law, and the prohibition on indiscriminate attacks, in t for your observations on the following matters:

1. the planning and execution of the reported airstrikes in Iran, particularly in areas where civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, residential buildings and energy facilities, was present.
2. Please provide information on any investigations that have been initiated regarding the reported strike on the girls’ school in Minab, including the

scope of the investigation, the expected timeline for the publication of findings, the release of relevant evidence and the engagement with international mechanisms.

3. Please clarify the steps taken to ensure accountability for any violations identified, in particular for the reported bombing of the girls' school in Minab, including possible criminal investigations against those responsible.
4. Please indicate whether any reparations or other forms of remedy are available to victims of airstrikes in Iran, including the families of girls killed in the attack on the school.
5. Please provide information on any assessments conducted regarding the reported presence of toxic substances or environmental contamination, including potential impacts on public health, especially on women and girls. In particular, please clarify what measures have been taken to protect the civilian population from exposure to potentially hazardous substances.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government to clarify the issues in question.

Please be informed that a letter on this subject matter has also been sent to the United States of America, and a copy has been sent to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem
Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Farida Shaheed
Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Morris Tidball-Binz
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

George Katrougalos
Independent expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order

Ben Saul
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the following provisions of international human rights law.

Prohibition of the crime of aggression

We wish to recall that the Charter of the United Nations establishes the fundamental principles governing international peace and security. Article 2(3) of the Charter requires that all Members settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered. Article 2(4) further provides that: "*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.*" The prohibition of the threat or use of force constitutes a cornerstone of the international legal order and is also widely recognized as reflecting customary international law.

Right to life

The alleged attacks resulting in mass killings of civilians, including women and girls, appear in contravention with the right to life protected under international human rights law, specifically article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Israel on 3 October 1991, as well as under international humanitarian law.

In its general comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee stated that "practices inconsistent with international humanitarian law, entailing a risk to the lives of civilians and other persons protected by international humanitarian law, including the targeting of civilians, civilian objects and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, indiscriminate attacks, failure to apply the principles of precaution and proportionality, and the use of human shields would also violate article 6 of the Covenant. States parties should, in general, disclose the criteria for attacking with lethal force individuals or objects whose targeting is expected to result in deprivation of life, including the legal basis for specific attacks, the process of identification of military targets and combatants or persons taking a direct part in hostilities, the circumstances in which relevant means and methods of warfare have been used, and whether less harmful alternatives were considered. They must also investigate alleged or suspected violations of article 6 in situations of armed conflict in accordance with the relevant international standards." (CCPR/C/GC/36, par. 64).

The Human Rights Committee has interpreted States parties' obligations under article 6 as extending to all persons subject to their jurisdiction, including persons over whose enjoyment of the right to life a State exercises power or effective control, and also to persons outside the State's territory whose right to life is affected by the State's military or other activities in a direct and reasonably foreseeable manner (CCPR/C/GC/36, par. 63). In this context, allegations of lethal operations affecting

civilians abroad may engage the State's obligations under article 6 ICCPR, alongside the applicable rules of international humanitarian law.

Principles of international humanitarian law

International humanitarian law binds all parties and regulates the conduct of hostilities, including through the principles of distinction and precautions in attack, as well as rules on warnings and special protections for medical and humanitarian personnel. While codified in the Four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, they are also widely regarded, at the present stage of the development of international law, as constituting parts of customary law. Additional protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 stipulates that grave breaches of the Conventions and the Protocol shall be regarded as war crimes (art. 85(5)).

Although Israel did not ratify additional protocol I or II (1977), key rules governing the conduct of hostilities, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack, form part of customary IHL, meaning they bind all parties to an armed conflict irrespective of treaty ratification.

Regarding the principle of distinction, the additional protocol I prohibits indiscriminate attacks as well as attacks "which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects... which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated" (art. 51(4) and art. 51(5)(b)). The commanders are accordingly required to do "everything feasible" to verify that the objectives to be attacked are neither civilians nor civilian objects (art. 57(2)(a)(i)). Moreover, in case of doubt whether an object, such as a school, is dedicated to civilian purposes, presumption should be made in favor of its civilian status (art. 52(3)). Civilian objects, including homes, schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, are protected against attack unless and for such time as they qualify as military objectives. A civilian object may become a military objective only where, by its nature, location, purpose or use, it makes an effective contribution to military action and its destruction, capture or neutralization offers a definite military advantage in the circumstances ruling at the time (art. 52(2)). We also wish to recall that protections must be afforded to medical units and medical and humanitarian personnel, who must not be attacked or impeded in the performance of their humanitarian functions (art. 15(1) and 71(2)).

Furthermore, international humanitarian law also requires compliance with the principle of precautions. Under the additional protocol I, those who plan or decide upon an attack should "take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view to avoiding, and in any event minimizing, incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects." (art. 57(2)(a)(ii)). They are also required to refrain from launching an attack expected to cause incidental civilian harm that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated and to cancel or suspend an attack if it becomes apparent that the objective is not a military objective or that the attack would be disproportionate (art. 57(2)(b)).

We further recall that international humanitarian law affords particular protection to objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Parties to the conflict are prohibited from attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless

such objects for the specific purpose of denying them to the civilian population or the adverse party, whatever the motive, where this would result in the starvation of civilians or otherwise jeopardize their survival (additional protocol I, art. 54). More generally, extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, including housing, electricity, water, sanitation, healthcare, educational facilities and other infrastructure essential for the civilian population, may raise serious concerns under the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, particularly where such destruction has severe and foreseeable consequences for the civilian population and their means of subsistence.

Affirming those principles, the Security Council in resolution S/RES/2601(2021) urged all parties to armed conflicts to “respect the civilian character of schools and educational facilities in accordance with international humanitarian law.” In the same vein, in resolution S/RES/1998 (2011), the Security Council strongly condemned “attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access by parties to armed conflict and all other violations of international law committed against children in situations of armed conflict.”

Duty to investigate violations

We wish to recall the duty of states to effectively and independently investigate grave violations of fundamental human rights of women and girls. The Human Rights Committee stressed that “Investigations into allegations of violations of article 6 must always be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, credible and transparent” and that full reparation should be granted to victims. (CCPR/C/GC/36, par. 28). The Committee further specified that permitting or failing to take appropriate measures or to exercise due diligence to prevent, punish, investigate and bring perpetrators to justice could give rise to a breach of the Covenant (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, par. 14).

Moreover, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War requires States to search for and prosecute persons alleged to have committed grave breaches (art. 146). Responsibility may extend beyond direct perpetrators to those who ordered, authorized, or otherwise bear responsibility, including under command/superior responsibility where commanders knew or, owing to the circumstances at the time, should have known that subordinates were committing or about to commit violations and failed to take necessary and reasonable measures within their power to prevent such acts or to submit the matter for investigation and prosecution (ICRC rule 153.).

The Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death provides that investigations into potentially unlawful deaths must be “prompt, effective, thorough, independent, impartial and transparent.” (HR/PUB/17/4). With regard to the situation of children, including girls, the Committee on the Rights of the Child also stressed that states have special obligations of due diligence to investigate and to punish those responsible as well as to provide access to redress for violence (CRC/C/GC/13, par. 5). The CEDAW Committee’s general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations emphasized the importance of taking measures to prevent the occurrence of attacks and threats against schoolgirls

and their teachers and ensuring that perpetrators of such acts of violence are promptly investigated, prosecuted and punished (CEDAW/C/GC/30, par. 52(a)).

States are also under an obligation to ensure that those responsible for potentially unlawful deprivations of life are held accountable through appropriate criminal, disciplinary or other proceedings, as warranted by the evidence. A failure to investigate, prosecute and, where appropriate, punish those responsible may itself constitute a violation of the procedural dimension of the right to life (CCPR/C/GC/36, paras. 27–28).

Where the alleged conduct amounts to serious violations of international humanitarian law, individual criminal responsibility may also arise under international criminal law, including for war crimes. Responsibility may extend beyond the direct perpetrator to military commanders and other superiors where the relevant legal requirements are satisfied, including under article 28 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Protection of women

We further wish to recall that under articles 2 and 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), state parties undertake to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure the effective protection of women's rights through appropriate measures. CEDAW Committee in general recommendation No. 35 (2017) observed that gender-based violence against women is included under article 1 prohibition (CEDAW/C/GC/35, art. 21). General recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee (1992) in paragraph 6 defines gender-based violence as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” with particularly the latter being often the case in armed conflicts.

We also recall that the Security Council, in its landmark resolution 1325 (2000), expressed explicit concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognized the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation.

Protection of children, including girls

We wish to remind that article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Israel ratified on 3 October 1991, recognizes the inherent right of every child to life (art. 6(1)) and establishes the obligations upon States to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival of the child (art. 6(2)). Under article 38 of the CRC, states must respect and ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts, which are relevant to the child, as well as “take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.” Additionally, under the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (art. 77) and customary international humanitarian law (rule 135), children are also treated as particularly vulnerable and entitled to special respect and protection.

The CRC and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by Israel on 3 October 1991, also recognize and protect children's right to education (CRC, art. 28(1) and ICESCR, art. 13(1)), which requires conditions of safety at schools. The CEDAW Committee stressed that attacks on education and use of schools and universities by the military or armed groups have a disproportionate or discriminatory impact upon girls and women (CEDAW/C/GC/36, par. 49).

Right to education

The fundamental right to education has been consistently reaffirmed and reinforced in international human rights law, both as a right in itself and as an enabling right indispensable for the realization of all other human rights. It is enshrined in key international human rights instruments, including article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has come to be regarded as an authoritative articulation of customary international law; article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 38 (4) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reinforces provides for special protection for children in armed conflict.

Under international human rights law, States have obligations to respect (not interfere with access), protect (prevent violations by third parties) and fulfil (adopt all necessary measures to facilitate and provide) the right to education. States must ensure that education remains available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable and must guarantee non-discrimination and equal treatment in access and quality for all learners. They are required to provide free and compulsory primary education as an immediate obligation while progressively realizing universal access to secondary and higher education and refraining from measures that undermine or degrade educational access and quality.

These obligations remain in force during armed conflict, as consistently confirmed by international human rights mechanisms. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has clarified in its general comment No. 3 (1990) on the nature of States parties' obligations that minimum core obligations, including the provision of "the most basic forms of education", must be fulfilled without delay. The Committee has linked the destruction of schools with violations of economic, social and cultural rights in the context of armed hostilities (E/C.12/AZE/CO/4, para. 6). The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that States prioritize the rehabilitation of school buildings and facilities and ensure that school infrastructure damaged as a result of military occupation is promptly and fully restored (CRC/C/OPAC/IRQ/CO/1).

Neither the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights nor the Convention on the Rights of the Child have a derogation clause allowing States Parties to temporarily suspend some of their obligations during a crisis. In addition, existing declarations and reservations to the two treaties do not refer to education in armed conflict.

International humanitarian law protects civilians and civilian objects during armed conflict, including students, teachers, non-teaching staff and educational facilities, and imposes limits on the means and methods of warfare. Many rules of international humanitarian law are intended to ensure that students, educational staff and educational facilities are protected and that education can continue. Parties to a conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian objects (including schools) and military objectives, and attacks must be carried out in a manner that respects the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions. Children affected by either international or non-international armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection, including in terms of access to education. International humanitarian law applies equally to States and to non-State armed groups in situations of armed conflict.

The provisions of international humanitarian law impose specific education-related duties on parties to an armed conflict. Article 24 of the Fourth Geneva Convention requires States to ensure that children under 15 years of age who are orphaned or separated are provided with maintenance, religious practice and education, preferably by persons of similar cultural tradition. Customary international humanitarian law further strengthens the protection of educational infrastructure as cultural property: rules 38 and 40 of the customary law study of the International Committee of the Red Cross require parties to take special care in military operations to avoid damage to educational buildings and prohibit the seizure, destruction or wilful damage of such buildings and acts of theft, pillage or vandalism directed against them.

International humanitarian law and international human rights law have mutually reinforcing and complementary roles in times of armed conflict, as clearly confirmed in legal and jurisprudential developments.

International criminal law establishes individual responsibility for serious violations. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court expressly criminalizes as war crimes the intentional directing of attacks against buildings dedicated to education in international and non-international armed conflicts (provided that they are not legitimate military objectives). Attacks on education may also amount to the particular crimes against humanity listed in article 7 of the Rome Statute if perpetrated as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. In cases where education-related crimes are motivated by discrimination aimed at preventing a particular group from accessing education on the basis of, *inter alia*, their gender, ethnicity or religious identity, this may constitute the crime of persecution. Article 7 (2) of the Rome Statute defines persecution as the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity, as recognized in recent jurisprudence of the International Criminal Court.

As detailed in the 2025 report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education on the right to education in armed conflict (A/80/479), in armed conflict, education is a life-saving right and a strategic investment in peace. The right to education, guaranteed under international human rights law, remains fully applicable during emergencies, including armed conflict.

Education must be recognized as a core humanitarian priority, an essential service delivered alongside food, water, shelter and healthcare. Education fosters the values essential for post-conflict recovery, such as mutual respect, human dignity, social cohesion and adherence to international norms. Education can serve to repair harms resulting from the gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law that are often inflicted on children during conflict.

Ensuring the continuity and safety of quality education in conflict settings is therefore not only a legal obligation of States, but also a vital investment in stability, prosperity and future peace. Safe access to education during armed conflict protects children from recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, child labour, exploitation, early and forced marriage, sexual violence and other abuses. Continuity of safe learning offers children a sense of normalcy, psychosocial support and recovery from trauma while building key skills for recovery and long-term peace. Schools and other learning spaces are protective environments that uphold children's rights and well-being. They are also key entry points for identifying vulnerable children, delivering care and connecting children to essential services.

Safeguarding education requires proactive measures, including risk-informed planning, contingency strategies and clear protection measures. Educational facilities must be protected from attack and military use and teachers and education personnel must be safeguarded, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Girls, displaced children, children with disabilities and vulnerable groups need particular attention, as they face the greatest risks of exclusion.

Right to the highest attainable standard of health and protection from hazardous substances

We wish to recall that article 12(1) of the ICESCR recognizes “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights clarified that the right to health extends not only to access to health care but also to the underlying determinants of health, including safe water, adequate sanitation, and a healthy environment. (E/C.12/2000/4). In situations of armed conflict, these obligations must be interpreted in conjunction with international humanitarian law, which provides for protection for hospitals and health workers.

The destruction or disruption of healthcare infrastructure may have disproportionate consequences for women and girls, particularly in relation to maternal and reproductive health. Article 12 of CEDAW obliges States to ensure access to health services, including those related to pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period. In contexts where hospitals are damaged or patients are forced to evacuate medical facilities, access to emergency obstetric care, neonatal treatment, prenatal services, and postnatal care may be severely compromised. Article 24 of the CRC further requires States to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for children and to take measures to combat disease and malnutrition, including through the provision of clean drinking water and the consideration of environmental pollution. Additionally, exposure to toxic and hazardous substances as a result of bombing may threaten the enjoyment of the right to health, particularly of pregnant women and girls. Article 55 of the additional protocol I to the Geneva Conventions prohibits methods or means of

warfare that are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment, particularly where such damage may prejudice the health or survival of the population.