

## *“The Safe Schools Declaration: Protecting Education from Attack during Armed Conflict”*

*Statement, as delivered on 24 May 2016 by Dr. Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, at the event, “The Safe Schools Declaration: Protecting Education from Attack during Armed Conflict,” hosted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey.*

I would like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway for organizing this important event. I would also like to thank this panel of distinguished speakers.

This summit is taking place at a time where there are currently more people displaced by war, persecution and conflict than at any time since the Second World War — almost 60 million in total. We are seeing deliberate attacks on schools, students and teachers, with alarming regularity as conflicts increase in both intensity and scope.

According to UNICEF, there are currently nearly 24 million children in 22 countries affected by conflict who are unable to attend school. This includes 40 percent of all Afghan children, 41 percent of those in Sudan and 51 percent of South Sudanese schoolchildren deprived of an education by the civil war.

In Nigeria between 2009 and 2015 more than 910 schools were destroyed by Boko Haram, while at least 600 teachers have been killed and hundreds of school children abducted. These attacks have been used to promote intolerance and exclusion, to further discrimination and generate fear. These attacks not only plunge students into educational darkness, they are intended to sharpen the differences between people.

Children who are not in school, who languish in refugee camps or remain trapped within conflict ridden societies, are most at risk of falling victim to grave human rights violations, being recruited as child soldiers, forced into bonded labor or slavery, and are at a far greater risk of being victims of mass atrocities.

With 24 million children in conflict-affected countries still deprived of a proper education and exposed to violent conflict, we are still struggling to make the UN’s promise of the universal right to an education, a universal reality. It is for these reasons that we and other civil society organizations strongly urge states to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.

In keeping with the Responsibility to Protect, as well as the first and second core responsibilities of this Summit, leaders must end impunity for attacks on education.

I thank you.