



**Human Rights Watch Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
In advance of its Adoption of the List of Issues for Uganda  
80<sup>th</sup> pre-session January 2021**

**Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Women and Girls by Soldiers (article 2)**

Ugandan soldiers deployed in the Central African Republic have sexually exploited or abused at least 13 women and girls between 2015 and 2017, including at least one rape, and threatened some victims to remain silent. The Ugandan military was deployed in the country between 2009 and 2017 as a part of the African Union's Regional Task Force to eliminate the Lord's Resistance Army rebel group.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a total of 13 women and 3 girls in early 2017, who described exploitation or abuse, including rape, since 2010 by Ugandan soldiers in the southeastern town of Obo, where Ugandan forces were based, and heard credible accounts of other cases. Two of the women were girls when the exploitation or abuse took place. Two women and one girl said that soldiers threatened reprisals if they told Ugandan and United Nations investigators about the abuse.

Fifteen of the women and girls interviewed said they became pregnant, but in each case the soldier who fathered the child left the country and has not provided any support. The 16 cases documented by Human Rights Watch clearly under-represent the full extent of sexual exploitation and abuse by the Ugandan forces, not only because sexual violence is generally underreported, but also because others, including the UN and local health workers, have documented cases of rape and sexual slavery.<sup>1</sup>

In January 2017, the BBC reported cases of rape by Ugandan soldiers in the Central African Republic, including of a 12-year-old girl who gave birth.<sup>2</sup> The Ugandan military said at the time that it conducted an investigation in Obo and found no evidence of wrongdoing.

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<sup>1</sup> "Central African Republic: Ugandan Troops Harm Women, Girls: Repeated Sexual Exploitation and Abuse," Human Rights Watch news release, May 15, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/15/central-african-republic-ugandan-troops-harm-women-girls>

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Byaruhanga, "I was 12 when I was raped by a Ugandan soldier", *BBC News*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-38737824> (accessed January 15, 2021)

Several women and girls told Human Rights Watch that Ugandan military investigators had interviewed them over the past year, but that there was no follow-up and they had no information about the investigation.

*Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee ask the government of Uganda:*

- What steps are being taken to investigate and prosecute instances of serious misconduct including sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by members of the Ugandan military who are or have been deployed abroad?
- What training exists on sexual exploitation and abuse for soldiers serving in the armed forces or UN or African Union peacekeeping operations? What standard of conduct is in place regarding sexual exploitation and abuse for members of Uganda's armed forces and what measures are being implemented to ensure this standard is upheld, whether in Ugandan operations or UN or African Union peacekeeping operations?
- What measures have been taken to ensure an increase in the number of women employed within the military, police, and peacekeeping operations?

### **Protection of Education from Attack (article 10)**

As recognized by this Committee in its *General Recommendation No. 30*, attacks on students and schools, and the use of schools for military purposes, disproportionately affect girls, who are sometimes the focus of targeted attacks and are more likely to be kept out of school due to security concerns.<sup>3</sup>

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 conflict;<sup>4</sup> 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*.<sup>5</sup> The African Union Peace and Security Council has urged all of its member states to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.<sup>6</sup> As of January 2021, 106 countries have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, including 28 African Union members. Uganda has yet to endorse this important declaration.

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<sup>3</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 30, Access to Education, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/30 (2013), para. 48. See also African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, General Comment on Article 22: Children in Situations of Conflict, (2020), para. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Safe Schools Declaration, May 28, 2015, [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe\\_schools\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf) (accessed January 23, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> 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](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf) (accessed January 23, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> African Union Peace and Security Council, "Ending Child Marriages Press Statement," June 13, 2017, [https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political\\_declarations/africa/press-statement.ending.child\\_marriage.13.06.2017.pdf](https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political_declarations/africa/press-statement.ending.child_marriage.13.06.2017.pdf) (accessed January 18, 2021)

As of December 2020, Uganda was contributing 652 military staff officers, experts, police, and troops to UN peacekeeping operations around the world. Peacekeeping troops are required to comply with the UN Department of Peace Operations “UN Infantry Battalion Manual” (2012), which includes the provision that “schools shall not be used by the military in their operations.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the 2017 Child Protection Policy of the UN Department of Peacekeeping 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 ... United Nations peace operations personnel shall at no time and for no amount of time use schools for military purposes.<sup>8</sup>

Uganda’s peacekeeping staff are deployed in Somalia and South Sudan — both countries where attacks on students and schools and the military use of schools by local parties have been documented.<sup>9</sup>

In October 2020, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child issued a general comment on children and armed conflict in Africa, in which they stated that “the African Union and other relevant African inter-governmental organizations that authorize peace support operations should adopt an explicit ban on the use of schools in their operations.”<sup>10</sup>

*Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee ask the government of Uganda:*

- Why has the government of Uganda not yet endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration?
- Are explicit protections for schools or universities from military use included in any policies, rules, or trainings for the Uganda People's Defence Force?
- Will the government support the position taken by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and call on the African Union and other relevant African inter-governmental organizations that authorize peace support operations to adopt an explicit ban on the use of schools in their operations?

## **Privatization of Education (article 10)**

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Infantry Battalion Manual, 2012, section 2.13, “Schools shall not be used by the military in their operations.”

<sup>8</sup> UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Field Support and Department of Political Affairs, “Child Protection in UN Peace Operations (Policy),” June 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Education Under Attack: 2020, The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2020, [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua\\_2020\\_full.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2020_full.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, General Comment on Article 22: Children in Situations of Conflict, (2020), para. 77.

Between 2004 and 2019, the share of Uganda’s national budget allocated to education shrunk from 20.3 percent to just 10 percent—well below the regional average of 16 percent and international standards of 20 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Underfunding has led to a widening of the financing gap in meeting ever-growing educational needs, as the population of school age children tripled between 1997 and 2014.<sup>12</sup> With already constrained budgets stretched even thinner, teacher absenteeism and the lack of schools in some localities posed severe obstacles to children’s access to quality education. Instead of compensating for any negative consequences engendered by the reduction in allocations, the government has increasingly relied on the private sector to provide education.

Privatization has not been matched with an adequate regulatory and monitoring framework. In a rush to implement and roll out the Universal Secondary Education policy in 2007, the government initiated a public-private partnership program with private schools to absorb the increasing number of students, without specifying social accountability safeguards or quality standards. The government did not regulate fees in private or public-private partnership schools, which often charge high prices that are out of reach of low-income households. In turn, it reduced investment in secondary schools, leaving children with few options for quality education in public schools.<sup>13</sup>

The rapid privatization and expansion of the Universal Secondary Education public-private partnership provoked substantial educational disparities. Evidence by civil society organizations shows that privatization in Uganda discriminates against children from low-income households and especially girls, reinforcing social and economic inequalities.<sup>14</sup> The probability of completing primary school is higher in urban than rural areas and increases with the relative wealth of the student’s household. Only 5 percent of girls from the poorest quintile attend secondary school, compared to 35 percent from the richest quintile.<sup>15</sup>

*Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee ask the government of Uganda:*

- Why has the share of the national budget allocated to education dropped by 10 percentage points between 2004 and 2019, which makes it significantly lower than both regional averages and international standards?

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<sup>11</sup> World Bank Group, “Economic Development & Human Capital in Uganda: A Case for Investing More in Education,” May 2019, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/925741559163051034/pdf/Economic-Development-and-Human-Capital-in-Uganda-A-Case-for-Investing-More-in-Education.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2021)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Lena Simet (Human Rights Watch), “From Pioneer to Laggard: Disinvestment and Privatization of Education in Uganda,” commentary, *NORRAG*, November 23, 2020, [https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/23/pioneer-laggard#\\_edn1](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/23/pioneer-laggard#_edn1)

<sup>14</sup> The Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, “Alternative Report Submitted by the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights and the Global Initiative for Social and Economic Rights,” October 2024,

[http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6e0958f6576ebde0e78c18/5ab294e72483d636f1909c81/5ab294fe2483d636f1909fa6/1521652990500/2014-10-10\\_ISERGIESCR-Uganda\\_CESCR.pdf?format=original](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6e0958f6576ebde0e78c18/5ab294e72483d636f1909c81/5ab294fe2483d636f1909fa6/1521652990500/2014-10-10_ISERGIESCR-Uganda_CESCR.pdf?format=original) (accessed January 15, 2021)

<sup>15</sup> Government of Uganda, “Demographic and Health Survey 2016,” 2016, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR333/FR333.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2021)

- What steps are being taken to ensure primary education is genuinely free and access to free secondary education is treated as an urgent and immediate priority rather than as a goal to be realized progressively over time?
- What steps are being taken to empower girls to attend school, address girls' dropout rates and adopt measures to retain girls in school, especially girls from low-income households?