



## Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Bhutan, 75<sup>th</sup> plenary session

*January 2017*

### Summary

This submission focuses on the protection of students, teachers, schools, and universities in situations of armed conflict. It relates to Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The government of Bhutan attended the first international conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, held in Oslo in May 2015, but did not endorse the Declaration.<sup>1</sup> The Safe Schools Declaration is a political commitment to better protect students, educational staff, schools, and universities during armed conflict. It was drafted through a consultative process led by Norway and Argentina.

The Safe Schools Declaration includes a commitment to use and implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.<sup>2</sup> The Bhutanese troops serving in United Nations peacekeeping operations in Mali, South Sudan, and Sudan are already obligated to follow the UN requirement to not use schools in their operations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</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 October 19, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), *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 October 19, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Infantry Battalion Manual, 2012, section 2.13, "Schools shall not be used by the military in their operations."

*Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee:*

- Commend the government of Bhutan for their participation at the 2015 Safe Schools Conference.
- Ask what steps Bhutan has taken in line with Security Council Resolutions 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015), which encourage member states to take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools?
- Recommend that the government of Bhutan endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.