



**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 Bhutan  
80<sup>th</sup> pre-session *January 2021***

**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>1</sup>

In 2017 the Committee on the Rights of the Child called on Bhutan to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration.<sup>2</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>3</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>4</sup> As of January 2021, 106 countries have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration. Bhutan has yet to endorse this important declaration.

As of November 2020, Bhutan was contributing 27 military staff officers, experts, and police 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>5</sup>

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<sup>1</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.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Concluding observations on the report submitted by Bhutan under article 8 (1) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Bhutan,” CRC/C/OPAC/BTN/CO/1, June 27, 2017, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fOPAC%2fBTN%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2fOPAC%2fBTN%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en) (accessed January 11, 2021), para. 11.

<sup>3</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>4</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>5</sup> United Nations Infantry Battalion Manual, 2012, section 2.13, “Schools shall not be used by the military in their operations.”

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>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup>

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

- Why has the government of Bhutan not yet followed the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and 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?

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<sup>6</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>7</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)