



## **UNOWAS Annual Conference 2023**

### **Resolution 2601(2021): the nexus between security, access to education, and governance in the central Sahel and West Africa**

*Mbour, Senegal 21 – 22 November 2023*

## **FINAL DECLARATION**

**22 November 2023**

## Background

On 21 – 22 November 2023, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) organized in Mbour, near Dakar in the Republic of Senegal, its annual colloquium, which this year focused on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601(2021) on the nexus between security, access to education, and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa.

The colloquium brought together around sixty participants, including experts and practitioners in governance, education in emergencies, and security, senior executives from the ministries of education, defense, and finance coming from the countries of the region, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations, notably, ECOWAS, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Government of the Kingdom of Norway, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in situations of Armed Conflict (CAAC), UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, the Working Group for Education in Emergency Situations (WG EiE), the Global Coalition for the Protection of Education against Attacks (GCPEA), COOPI and Plan International.

The conference was held in a context of increased armed conflicts and insecurity in the Central Sahel and West Africa region. This situation has negatively impacted on access to education for children and youths with a sharp surge in the number of closed schools. This persistent insecurity manifests itself, among other things, through attacks against civilians and state infrastructures, including schools and health centers. As of November 2023, more than 9,130 schools were closed in West Africa and the Central Sahel region, either because they were the direct target of attacks by non-state armed groups (NSAGs), or indirectly due to different manifestations or consequences of insecurity.

The symposium was based on Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021), the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD - 2015) to which almost all countries in the region and a total of 118 States in the world have adhered, the African Union process on improving education through Agenda 2063, and the recommendations of the September 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES), as well as Sustainable Development Goal #4. The conference intended to build on existing initiatives, on the political and programmatic responses already formulated and currently being implemented by the States of the region.

The discussions, which focused on the main insecurity factors affecting access to education and the objective of achieving a quality, inclusive, and equitable education, facilitated a better understanding of the role of governance and public policies in accessing education in situation of emergencies, while protecting and promoting education. The exchanges allowed to propose measures as well as concrete strategies that governments and other stakeholders can take up to prevent the resurgence of insecurity, ensure the continuity of unfettered access to education, even in conflict situations, while mitigating the negative effects of insecurity on access to educational opportunities for young girls and boys. Therefore, participants made the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

- 1) Promote the full implementation of Resolution 2601(2021) and the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD-2015) by leveraging the good offices of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Head of UNOWAS, in close cooperation with national, regional, and international partners, with Heads of State and Government of the region and other key political decision-makers for the prioritization of education, particularly in situation of emergency, onto their political agendas.
- 2) Take urgent action to end attacks on education and provide targeted efforts to prevent armed conflict, by focusing on the root causes and contributing factors, including inclusive governance, good management of the country's resources, their equitable distribution amongst geographic areas and different populations' segments.
- 3) Adopt a holistic approach to respond to situations of insecurity, combining security efforts with socio-economic and political commitments, including dialogue with non-state armed groups where appropriate.
- 4) Governments must ensure close collaboration between stakeholders and work for the development of concerted synergies in their responses to endangered access to education, particularly between the different departments and institutions of the State, decentralized and deconcentrated entities, defense and security forces, communities and citizens in affected areas, as well as partners.
- 5) National Governments and their technical and financial partners, including the private sector, must invest in the development of specific methods for the dissemination of audio, audiovisual and digital educational programs, both online and offline.
- 6) Respect the imperative "education cannot wait!". In this regard, ensure the continuity of access to education, among other things, through distance learning, the relocation of closed schools, or at risk to be closed, to secure specific areas, the establishment of mobile schools apt to support displaced populations and their children, the hiring of local teachers, and the construction of temporary learning spaces in the so-called 'reception areas' in order to respond to sudden and growing numbers of students in the 'reception localities'.
- 7) Systematically involve young people in initiatives aimed at improving their own situation, particularly through creation of socio-economic opportunities, thus contributing to making them less vulnerable.
- 8) Raise awareness among teachers, students, and parents about the factors determining insecurity in accessing school, including anti-personnel mines, publicize emergency

evacuation procedures and the attitudes to adopt in the event of attacks, work to establish new and strengthen existing community based early warning mechanisms.

- 9) Plan for measures to take in post-conflict settings for “*building back better*”, in order to be able to rehabilitate, rebuild, and reopen schools by providing psychological support for students, and those victims of trauma, as well as care for young dropouts or orphans.
- 10) Develop resource mobilization strategies and strengthen investments in state education, including in emergencies. Ensure coherence between the provision of education as delivered by public or private institutions. Donors and partners must remain open and listen to education stakeholders so that funding is in alignment with the reality on the ground.
- 11) Frame any measure promoting good governance of education, in an integrated approach that includes gender considerations with a view to resolving the difficulties of access to education for girls, a cause of disparity and delay in achieving true sustainable development.
- 12) Support any necessary measure to ensure accountability of those guilty of violations and attacks on children's rights to education through fair and effective justice.
- 13) Prioritize children's rights while emphasizing not only the right to quality education, but also the centrality of children's role as agents of change for safer schools and a more secure world.
- 14) Promote reliable data generation and their utilization as a basis for planning, including through the development of any appropriate high-tech tools to support understanding of the factors revolving around unsafe schools and unsecure access to education. Data should inform the crafting of responses to unsafe access to schools for those to be adapted to the reality of each context.
- 15) Continue exchanges within a Community of Practitioners to nourish the experiences' sharing, good practices and lessons learned initiatives, particularly between African countries and regions.