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Gaza: UNESCO calls for an immediate halt to strikes against schools

UNESCO is gravely concerned about the impact of the hostilities in the Gaza Strip on students and education professionals. The Organization calls for the protection of educational establishments, which often serve as shelters for the population, and recalls that targeting them or using them for military purposes constitute violations of international law.



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Following the terrorist attacks committed against Israeli civilians by Hamas on 7 October, the operations of the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip have caused a serious humanitarian crisis affecting all aspects of civilian life, including education. Today, more than 625,000 pupils and more than 22,500 teachers in the area are in an extremely vulnerable situation.

Since 7 October, more than 200 schools have been damaged - around 40% of the total number of schools in the Gaza Strip - about forty of them very seriously, according to UNICEF data.

In accordance with its mandate, UNESCO reminds all actors of their obligation to comply with international humanitarian law, in particular with Resolution 2601 adopted in 2021 by the United Nations Security Council, which “strongly

condemns the continued attacks as well as threats of attacks that are in contravention of international humanitarian law against schools and civilians connected with schools, including children and teachers, and urges all parties to armed conflict to immediately cease such attacks and threats of attacks and to refrain from actions that impede access to education.”

UNESCO points out that this same resolution “condemns the military use of schools in contravention of international law, and recognizes that use by armed forces and armed groups may render schools legitimate targets of attack, thus endangering children’s and teachers’ safety as well as their education”.

Among the many civilian victims in Gaza were 38 employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the main provider of education in the Gaza Strip. The vast majority of these staff were teachers and educators. UNESCO and its staff join their families, friends and colleagues in mourning.

UNRWA has 183 schools under its responsibility in Gaza, which welcomed nearly 300,000 pupils at the start of the last school year. Many of these educational establishments have now been converted into shelters for the population. UNRWA's nearly 13,000 staff are on the front line, carrying out vitally important work to help schoolchildren, education professionals and all those affected by the disaster. They must be able to continue their work and be protected from the fighting.

Press contact



Thomas Mallard
Press officer



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