



# **VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NORTH EASTERN KENYA: TODAY'S CHALLENGE AGAINST SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION (2015)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite Kenya having endorsed Safe Schools Declaration (2015) with a commitment to safeguard education in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in respect of the learners, teachers, facilities and infrastructure amidst armed conflict. Notably, there are experiences of violent extremist attacks targeted at educational establishments, indicating a realization shortfall. In this regard, Safe Schools Declaration (2015) intends to have a continuation of effective education amidst recognized armed conflict such as the activities of violent extremists in North Eastern Kenya. However, in the recent past, there have been continued attacks against educational establishments leading to stakeholder fear, abduction, injury, and death, besides destruction of vital educational property. So far the government has promised to increase security efforts in the affected areas, but still, there, seem to be some leakage as time and again there are reports of violent extremist attacks, reportedly targeting non-local stakeholders, particularly the teachers. This has borne negative consequences such as non-local teacher reaction by desertion, absconding duty, and seeking transfer to safer areas, earlier on within North Eastern counties, but lately outside the region. In line with this, there have been some severe violent extremist attacks leading to the deaths of 32 non-local teachers in the period 2015 to 2020 hence the national teacher employer, Teachers Service Commission (TSC), decided to transfer all non-local teachers from this area to safer regions in the country, outside North Eastern Kenya. This teacher transfer event has further worsened teacher shortage which, for Kenya as a whole has been a national challenge, crippling curriculum implementation activities towards 2020 end year national primary and secondary school examinations for children. Given the consideration that the right to life supersedes the right to education, this paper gives an overview of the educational survival position in North Eastern Kenya against the background of Kenya having endorsed Safe Schools Declaration (2015).

**KEY WORDS:** Extremism; Violence; Teacher Transfers; Safe Schools Declaration (2015), North Eastern Kenya, TSC

**NORTH EASTERN KENYA:** Wajir, Mandera, and Garissa Counties

**EXTREMISM:** Forcefully rejecting the existing means of political participation, attempting to create new ideologies and narratives to bring about a structural change in all spheres of life (social, political or economic) by challenging the legitimacy of existing system institutions (Adopted from Pakistan-based think-tank, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) January 2009).

**SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION (2015)**

The **Safe Schools Declaration** 2015 (SSD) is an inter-governmental political commitment that was opened for endorsement by countries at an international conference held in Oslo, Norway, on 28-29 May 2015 (AfricaNews, 2019). SSD was the outcome of a process of consultations between countries led by Norway and Argentina. SSD provides countries the opportunity to express political support for the protection of students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflict (SSD,2015; Coughlan , 2015) .By joining the SSD, members commit to undertake steps to make it less likely that students, teachers, schools, and universities will be attacked, and to mitigate the impact of attacks that occur. There are documented common Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. These include:

- i. Collecting reliable data on attacks and military use of schools and universities;
- ii. Assisting victims of attacks;
- iii. Investigating violations of national and international law and prosecuting perpetrators;
- iv. Developing and promoting “conflict sensitive” approaches to education;
- v. Seeking to continue education during armed conflict;
- vi. Supporting the United Nation’s work on the children and armed conflict agenda; and
- vii. Using guidelines to protect schools and universities from military use, and bringing them into domestic policy and operational frameworks.

In addition, it is of utmost importance to infuse these guidelines into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate to enhance chances of realization, with efforts through state guided monitoring and evaluation. Evidence of the value of SSD to participating countries can be construed from the very first remark, the opening paragraph:

"The impact of armed conflict on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and wider social challenges. Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, students, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Educational facilities have been used by parties to armed conflict as, *inter alia*, bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose students and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and students their right to education and so deprive communities of the foundations on which to build their future. In many countries, armed conflict continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children" (SSD, 2015).

As reported in Bede (2017), several countries already have explicit plans and programmes being implemented for education institutional protection with the aim of attaining safety for learners, teachers and other educational personnel alongside facilities and infrastructure. For instance, militants using school compounds as camps of operation in The Central African Republic are under pressure to leave such operational bases so that students can resume formal learning. In Afghanistan, the education ministry has used the declaration to advocate for the removal of military checkpoints and bases from school establishments. In Nigeria school security is increasingly enhanced through strategic positioning of police and military bases across the country. Somalia’s defense ministry has expanded its child protection unit, and charged it with ensuring in-school and out-of-school student safety. These just being a sneak-peek of activities in signatory countries across the world against the background of education continued experience of negative effects of armed conflict, there still needs to be focused strategic effort.

With regard to the right to education for all children and protection of this right as far as is circumstantially possible, in Kenya, the constitution commits to this. Even before endorsement of SSD, The Constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2010) read in part in Article 53 (1) (b) state that every child has a right to free and compulsory basic education and Article 9(a) the state shall take measures, including affirmative action programmes, to ensure that youth access relevant education and training. It wouldn’t therefore be expected that Kenya would be an unwilling player in SSD (2015) as this would negate its very own constitution.

## HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND EDUCATION

Western style education and schools have been either directly or indirectly the target of terror groups from time to time. In this regard, available statistics indicate that between 1970 and 2014, there were a total of 3400 attacks by terrorists on learning institutions in countries across the world. Out of these, Pakistan was leading at 2.7% followed in number of attacks by Thailand, Afghanistan and Iraq with instances of educational infrastructural destruction and some fatalities. Violent extremist groups such as The Taliban Islamists have claimed responsibility for most of the attacks (O'Malley & Unesco, 2010). In regions that are in their control, the schools have an order not to fly the government flags or sing the National anthem as a sign of and measure to inculcate defiance against state authority. As reported in Abbas, (2014) and Express Tribune(2015) among the frequently touted reasons for these attacks are:

- i. The Islamists view girl education as being 'unislamic' and so targeted the schools to hinder the learning process.
- ii. The schools also acted as bases for the security apparatus that were used by the government to deal with the insurgency. As a result, they attacked the schools to thwart such operations against them.
- iii. The schools are also the nearest symbol of the government against which they were at war.
- iv. They target the government property to destabilize and discredit it.
- v. They have demanded that the schools drop the western style of uniforms. They prefer to have the ladies wear the full 'hijab'.
- vi. Some Islamists are against any form of western education because it defiles children hence destruct it to demand purely Islamic education.

Following are highlights relating to violent extremist activities against educational establishments in different parts of the world outside Kenya namely Thailand, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia and Nigeria .

**Thailand:** In the provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, the security situation began deteriorating in December 2018 whereby extremists attacked 6 educational-Buddhist-law enforcement institutions. In January 2019, militants lynched a retired Buddhist teacher, a teacher protection unit injuring a police officer and a 12-year old girl. Attacks intensified after the year 2000 in which teachers, professors and instrutors were twice as likely to be targeted at 43% than global average at 19% (Brownatein ,2015).

**Afghanistan:** “ From fear of terrorism, from threats of enemies of Afghanistan, today as we speak, some 100,000 children who went to school last year, and the year before last do not go to school.” President of Karzai on International Women’s Day 2016.

Brutal attacks by extremists armed opposition groups on Afghan teachers, students, and their schools have occurred in their country recent months . Schools are frequently attacked to instill fear thereby infringing upon the fundamental human right to education( New York Times, 2019).

**Pakistan:** According to Express Tribune (Islamabad) 29/3/2015, Since 9/11 in USA, Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism, losing over 80,000 human lives, incurring economic losses of around 102.5 billion USD along with serious damage to its cultural and religious ethos.1 Of the several by-products of terrorism that have harmed the Pakistani state and society, the threat of violent extremism is the most potent one. For instance, the killing of 132 school children in Peshawar on 16 December 2014 is a sobering reminder that extremism poses an existential threat to Pakistan. “80,000 Pakistanis Killed in US War on Terror: report” . (Express Tribune ,2015; Republic of Pakistan, 2015)

In December, 2012 a militant group Tehrik-Taliban occasioned a suicide bomb and armed assault at the Army Public School in Peshawar killing 140 and injuring 100 including children (Global Terrorism Index, 2014) .

**Russia:** From 1/9/2004 to 3/9/2004, Chechen rebels held a school 1,100 (including 777 children) hostage in the Russian City of Belsan on the school opening day; after failed negotiations, the Russian government stormed the specific school building resulting to the death of over 334 people including children alongside the terrorists. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in 2017 that the Russian Government did not take sufficient preventive measures before the attack besides using excessive force to end the siege. (History.com 1/9/2004).

**Nigeria:** The Islamist group Boko Haram is clearly against any form of Western education whereby the area hosting its operational headquarters North East town of Maiduguri experiences a hampered education for citizens (Mark, 2015). In 2014, the group burnt down fourteen schools leading to over seven thousand school children being denied school opportunity. The most outrageous of their activities was the abduction of 276 school girls in Chibok town, Borno State

whom they later enslaved, impregnated and married them given the government's inability to timely rescue them (Mark, 2015). In another incident, a boarding school in Yobe State got closed as a result of Boko Haram killing 29 males and then sending away the girls with instructions to get married. In summary, terrorist attacks against educational settings in Nigeria included armed assaults (22%), bombings (27%), facility/infrastructure attacks (35%), and kidnappings (12%) (Global Terrorism Index, 2014).

## HIGHLIGHTS OF VIOLENCE AFFECTING EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS IN NORTH EASTERN KENYA

Kenya has over time experienced violent extremist activities affecting education and its facilities both within and outside North Eastern part of Kenya. It is therefore important to begin by providing evidence that violent extremism, though seemingly intense in North Eastern Kenya, is not only a North Eastern Kenya problem but a national challenge since it also has directly affected a few pockets of the population elsewhere in the country. Following are some of the cases reported on media:

- a) Local media reported that on February 15, 2017, gunmen opened fire on Kapindasum Primary School in Arabal location, Baringo county. The attack happened as teachers and students were leaving the school. One teacher was killed and another injured. Police believed the incident was part of territorial disputes between the Pokot and Tugen ethnic groups (Ndanyi, 2017).
- b) According to media sources, on February 10, 2014, assailants attacked the Saint Charles Mutego School in the Dagoreti area of Nairobi county and held students hostage. The attackers killed one student, wounded at least 40 others, and kidnapped an unknown number (Daily Nation 16/2/2014).
- c) According to local media, on July 5, 2017, members of al-Shabaab attacked Pandanguo village in Lamu county, causing damage to a school and other civilian infrastructure (The Standard, 5/7/2017).
- d) On June 27, 2017, police offered to transport 14 students from Mararani to Kiunga, Lamu county, as they made their way back to school after Eid celebrations. The police truck hit a land mine and was then shot at by suspected members of al-Shabaab. Four students were killed and five injured in the incident (Mwakilishi, 27/6/2017; New Indian Press, 27/6/2017; All Africa, 27/6/2017).
- e) Local media reported that on June 19, 2015, a teacher at Gandini Primary School in Kaloleini, Kilifi county, was accused of recruiting seven students between the ages of 4 and 16, after allegedly urging them to fight non-Muslims (Kukogho, 2015).
- f) Six months later, international media sources documented an incident in which the same teacher at Gandini Primary School was arrested and charged with radicalizing children and being affiliated with al-Shabaab. On January 7, 2016, the teacher was acquitted of being affiliated with al-Shabaab but found guilty of attempting to radicalize children. He received a 20-year prison sentence (Gaffey, 2016).

In North Eastern Kenya, there have been reported cases of violence meted directly against vital school stakeholders, namely teachers, pupils/students, and workmen, besides school facilities and infrastructure. Worth noting is the fact Teachers Service Commission (TSC) reported that 32 non-local teachers have been killed in terror attacks between 2015 to 2020 (Daily Nation, 23/2/2020). Today, the government had ordered and conducted the transfer of all non-local teachers from Garissa County, like has never been done anywhere else in Kenya before, following continued attacks causing injury and death, thus creating a further deficit of 3,000 teachers (Daily Nation, 3/2/2020). Boniface Onger, "North Eastern Kenya: The Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) on Monday asked teachers in schools bordering the volatile Kenya-Somali border to stay away until the government guarantees them security," *Standard*, May 27, 2013, as cited in GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2014*, pp. 154-155.

The result is hindered or no active formal learning in both primary and secondary schools due inadequacy or lack of teachers as a result of a wave of transfers and desertion. The following are highlights drawn from Wajir, Mandera, and Garissa Counties.

### **i. Wajir County**

- TSC transfers teachers in Wajir from areas prone to attack. Heavily armed gun-men attacked Kamuthe killing 3 tutors. Wajir TSC County Director told journalists that teachers had been transferred to areas in Wajir that were believed to be safer. This would allow them peace to discharge their duties. Daily Nation(16/1/2020)
- A dormitory at Saretho Primary School destroyed during terror attack and 3 pupils injured.(Daily Nation 13/1/2020).
- Invigilator in Wajir nursing serious injuries after being stabbed by students during KCSE examination at Buna Boys High School. The Standard (Vidokezo, 15/11/2019)
- November 22, 2016, when media sources reported that unknown gunmen opened fire on Abaqkorey High School in Wajir County(New Vision, 23/11/2016).

### **ii. Mandera County**

- Al-Shabaab kills 2 teachers in Mandera school attack. Business daily (10/10/2018).
- Crisis as over 800 teachers leave Mandera over insecurity; Chairman of Mandera County Educational Board admitted that 550 and 254 non-local secondary and primary school teachers had left schools. Daily Nation (6/2/2020).
- On November 22, 2014, local and international media sources documented an incident in which al-Shabaab gunmen shot 28 passengers on a bus traveling from the Kenya-Somalia border region to Nairobi. Of those killed , 17 were teachers who were travelling home for the holidays. They were among a group of people who were singled out because of their non-Muslim identities. Most of those killed were shot multiple times in the back (Daily Nation, 22/11/2014).

### **iii. Garissa County**

- 147 dead in Garissa University attack among them 2 guards and university students; heavily armed gun-men shot at students indiscriminately. The Standard (3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2015). Seventy nine people got injured while over five hundred students managed to escape. The very traumatic attack resulted into the indefinite closure of the University (Justice, 2015) . The surviving students were taken to other campuses to continue with their studies.
- Al Shabaab kill 3 teachers, destroy Safaricom communication mast in Garissa raid. The Standard(1/13/2020).
- Garissa teachers fail to resume duties over terror attack Kenya News (1/23/2020).
- TSC transfers all non-local teachers from Garissa County over insecurity. "...at the TSC headquarters in Nairobi on Monday, teachers celebrated receiving transfer letters as they said it signaled a fresh start in their careers..."(Daily Nation, 23/2/2020). Many have to commute to Nairobi , over 400 kilometers away, in an effort to process their transfers leaving students with no one losing several days of teaching (Woldeslase, 2013).
- Local and international media reported that, approximately six months later, on October 12, 2015, assailants from al-Shabaab kidnapped a Kenyan female teacher from Hagadera refugee camp in Dadaab, Garissa County. Kenya Defence Forces, backed by their counterparts from the Somali National Army, successfully rescued the teacher in Somalia four days later(Jubat,2015).
- On February 16, 2013, an explosion occurred at a primary school in Garissa city while the unidentified attacker was planting the device.(Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack; Education Under Attack,2018).

## CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISTS ACTIVITIES

- i. Because of the widespread targeting of teachers, teacher trade unions demand for teacher security: For instance, the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) asked teachers in many schools to leave the area until the government guaranteed their safety(The Standard, 17/1/2020).
- ii. The schools have been targeted with bombs that have destroyed the infrastructure and killed many people.
- iii. Many parents have opted to keep their children at home in fear of their security hence reduced learner enrolment in schools.
- iv. It has led to lower levels of literacy.
- v. Low quality teaching activities. A chief at Iftin primary School in Garissa County was found teaching class 8 candidates due to their teachers having been transferred (Mbataru,2020)
- vi. Teachers and lecturers in the unstable areas have resigned en masse in favor of other jobs with the government.
- vii. Premature retirements and long leaves have been the other options for teachers that are not able to survive the hostility in Taliban controlled areas (O'Malley & Unesco, 2010).
- viii. In some instances, convoys of vehicles associated with KCSE examinations organization to schools have come under attack thus disrupting the process (Capitalfm. 27/10/2011).
- ix. The government of Pakistan has had a problem reconstructing the areas destroyed from the war. These have been in fear of more destruction. The quality of education in such areas continues to suffer with very minimal enrollment rates (Express Tribune ,2015)
- x. There have been losses of important education records from terrorist attacks. Destruction of such crucial information systems has been a major source of setback in terms of continuity of their programs. (O'Malley & Unesco, 2010) .

## RECOMMENDATION

The measures to address the matter of violent extremism against education can be classified in two categories ; measures to prevent attacks as well as measures to mitigate the impact of the attacks.

- i. The government has to beef up security in the educational facilities. Each school should have at least a police post to grant the staff and students a sense of security in addition to scaring away prospective attackers (Woldeslase, 2013).
- ii. The government offers better terms of work for the teachers and other government workers that offer to work in the area as incentive, such as extra-hardship allowance and risk allowance, to induce them to work in this high risk area.
- iii. The government to encourage the natives of North Eastern Kenya and other insecure areas to work in their home places. The logic is that they are more able to withstand the pressure than strangers. They are also less vulnerable to violent extremists than non-locals.
- iv. The government has to be proactive in reconstructing the necessary facilities to assist in the learning process. Schools and other infrastructure that get destroyed should get replaced the soonest to avoid inconveniences (Woldeslase, 2013).
- v. The government to offer free professional teacher training to natives of North Eastern Kenya to fill gaps left by transferred teachers since natives understand the challenges in their homeland better.
- vi. The government to develop a curriculum with anti-violent-extremism course content to be offered to learners at both primary and secondary school level of education as a means of countering extremist radicalization among children to avoid later violent tendencies.

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