

26 February 2016

Our reference: MIN/93996/2016

The Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 18 February to the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of your constituents about the use of schools in conflict. I am replying as the Minister responsible for Children and Armed Conflict.

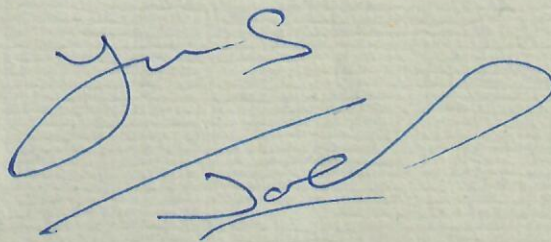
I agree that it is vital to minimise the adverse effects of armed conflict on children and schools. The Strategic Defence and Security Review, published in November 2015, reflects the Government's commitment to the Children and Armed Conflict agenda. We use our membership of the UN Security Council to call for all parties to conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and to release any children associated with armed forces and groups.

This political support is backed up by practical action. Under the No Lost Generation Initiative, for example, the UK has allocated £115 million to provide protection, and psychosocial support and informal and formal education to over 251,000 children in Syria and the region. As a result of the 'Supporting Syria and the Region Conference' in London on 4 February, by the end of the 2016/17 school year 1.7 million children – all refugee children and vulnerable children in host communities – will be in quality education with equal access for girls and boys.

While we welcome the spirit of the Safe Schools Declaration, we are concerned that the accompanying Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military use during Armed Conflict do not mirror the exact language of International Humanitarian Law, which risk complicating the application of International Humanitarian Law.

We take our obligations under International Humanitarian Law seriously and already afford schools and educational establishments a high degree of protection during military operations. We believe that better implementation of, and compliance with, existing International Humanitarian Law will provide the best protection for civilians, including children, in all situations of armed conflict.

I hope this letter reassures you that the UK Government is taking action to protect children in conflict.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Duddridge', written in a cursive style.

James Duddridge MP
Minister for Africa, the Overseas Territories, and the Caribbean