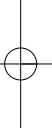
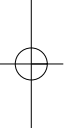




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## SAFE SCHOOLS: Every girl's right Stop Violence Against Women

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*Cover photo:* A young girl leaps through the ribbon as she wins a race in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

© 2004 Roobon/The Hunger Project-Bangladesh, Courtesy of Photoshare

*Inside front cover:* © Craig Cozart  
*Inside back cover:* Badges made by Monkeybiz, a South African women's income generating project, for the Stop Violence Against Women campaign.

Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories, who campaign on human rights. Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. We research, campaign, advocate and mobilize to end abuses of human rights. Amnesty International is independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. Our work is largely financed by contributions from our membership and donations.

This report draws on information researched by Amnesty International and by many other organizations working on this issue worldwide. It would not have been possible to produce this report without the generosity, expertise and knowledge of many organizations and activists from the women's movement. In particular, Amnesty International would like to thank Alison Symington, a human rights researcher and policy analyst based in Toronto, Canada.

This report is dedicated to all girls of school age, in the hope that together we can move towards a world where no girl's right to education will be treated as optional, unimportant or contingent on resources.





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# ONE/INTRODUCTION

When a girl grabs her book bag and puts on her uniform to run off to school in the morning, she looks forward to having fun with her schoolmates, learning new skills, exploring the world under the guidance of a thoughtful teacher, and playing games on the sports fields. Or does she? Does she instead fear for her safety, dread humiliating and violent treatment, and simply hope to get through another day?

Schools reflect wider society. The same forms of violence which women suffer throughout their lives – physical, sexual and psychological – are present in the lives of girls in and around their schools.

Every day, girls face being assaulted on their way to school, pushed and hit in school grounds, teased and insulted by their classmates, and humiliated by having rumours about them circulated through whisper campaigns, mobile phones or the internet. Some are threatened with sexual assault by other students, offered higher marks by teachers in exchange for sexual favours, even raped in the staff room. Some are caned or beaten in school in the name of discipline.

In countries racked by war, some girls are seized by armed groups, and some are injured or killed on their journey to school or when schools are attacked. Girls living in refugee or displaced people's camps are at high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Both girls and boys of school age can be the victims of violence, violence which violates their human rights. However, girls are more likely to be the victims of certain types of violence, such as sexual harassment and sexual assault, which undermine their self-esteem, educational success and long-term health and well-being.

**“Violence against women  
by men continues to  
cause more casualties  
than wars do today”**

Millennium Project, 2007  
State of the Future<sup>1</sup>



Certain girls face an increased risk of violence at school because of who they are. Lesbian girls, for example, experience both sexism and homophobia combined. They are more frequently subjected to sexual harassment and threatened with sexual violence than their heterosexual peers. Girls with disabilities face both sexism and disability discrimination, making them targets for teasing, physical abuse and sexual violence. Rates of abuse are higher for girls with disabilities, and the forms of violence they face may be more severe.<sup>2</sup>

Other aspects of girls' identity, including whether they are migrants, orphans or refugees, as well as their HIV status, caste, ethnicity and race, also increase their risk of abuse and shape the nature of the violence they experience.

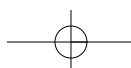
Violence at the hands of fellow students is the extreme end of a range of behaviour that often begins with verbal insults and threatening gestures. If less severe abuses are not challenged by those in authority, acts of violence often follow. Violence by teachers or other adults is the extreme end of another range of conduct – abuse of power. Teachers and other adults wield immense power over the lives of children, a power that they sometimes exploit.

**An education in a safe  
environment is the human  
right of every girl.**

Violence against girls takes place in and around many educational institutions all over the world. It is inflicted not only by teachers, but also by administrators, other school employees, fellow students and outsiders. The result is that countless girls are kept out of school, drop out of school, or do not fully participate in school.

## Education is a human right

Education is a human right. Every child is entitled to an education. States have a duty under international law to ensure that education is made available to all children. They are obliged to ensure that it is accessible, both financially and physically, that it is acceptable to students and respects their culture and human rights, and that it is adaptable to the needs of the student.





## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

The right to education is set out in many international human rights treaties and standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Regional human rights treaties also include the right to education.

Under international human rights law, states must ensure free and compulsory primary education to all school-aged children as a matter of priority, and must increase access to secondary, technical, vocational and higher education. What is taught should accord with human rights principles. This includes fostering diversity, understanding and gender equality, rather than segregation, prejudice and discrimination.

When girls are denied their right to education, this is often linked to other human rights violations. For example, if girls are denied their right to adequate housing by being forcibly evicted from their homes, they may not be able to attend school. If their right to the highest attainable standard of health is violated, for example if they are denied essential medication, this will adversely affect their educational opportunities. If girls are not protected from physical, psychological and sexual violence, the effect is to undermine their right to education, as well as their right to freedom from violence. Girls who are subjected to violence report that they have difficulty learning, find that their sense of self-worth is diminished, and may drop out of school altogether. Once they leave the formal education system, most will never return.

School fees are common, even though international law requires primary education to be free of charge. These illegal costs mean that many girls from poor families have little or no access to even a primary education. Where there are charges associated with access to education, families are left to make decisions about which children to prioritize for schooling. These choices invariably prejudice girls. Under international

**Education is both a right in itself and also a pathway to the enjoyment of other rights. If girls are kept out of school, drop out of school, or do not fully participate in school, then the promises of education cannot possibly be met.**

law, primary education at least should be available free of charge to all. That means free of all charges – including user fees, transportation costs, exam fees and other indirect charges – which act as a barrier. International law also obliges states to move towards free secondary education. Even so, schools around the world commonly impose charges. School fees and other charges are an insurmountable obstacle for many children, and girls are more likely to be excluded from school than boys when there isn't enough money to go round.

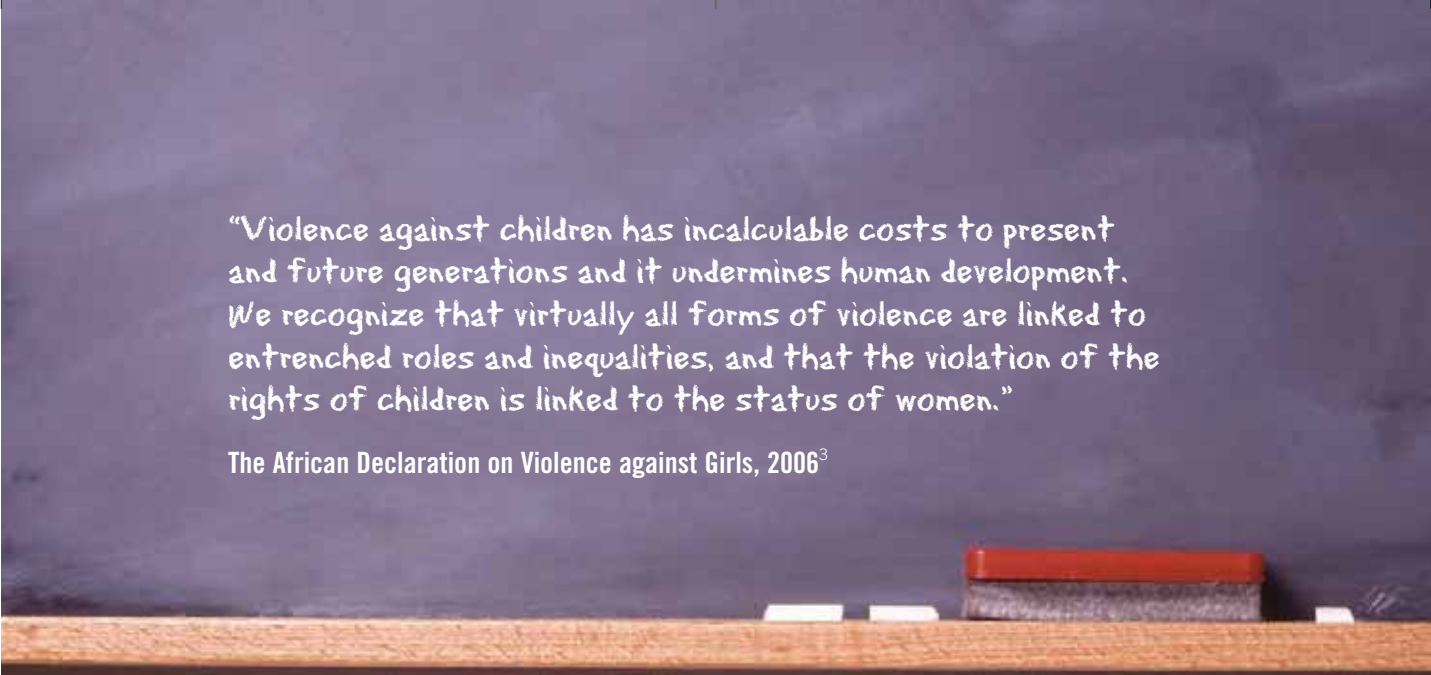
The violence that girls face as they pursue their education violates their fundamental human rights – rights to a life of dignity and security, to be free from violence and to education. No violence against girls is justifiable and all such violence is preventable.

## Inequality and inaction

Violence against girls in schools is a global phenomenon, taking different forms and with different levels of prevalence in different places. Why are girls targeted? The causes are rooted in male-dominated cultures that condone gender-based violence and treat women and girls as unequal and less worthy of education and other human rights. Gender inequality, generalized violence in society, the failure to hold abusers to account and the refusal to enforce laws and policies all contribute.

While both male and female students are affected by violence, gender inequality results in girls and women experiencing more gender-based violence in schools and in broader society. Around the world, men continue to hold more power and privilege than women, and men exert dominance over women's lives. Violence is one means of control and regulation.

Schools are marked by asymmetrical power relations: teachers are supposed to regulate children's behaviour; administrators are supposed to make rules and hand out punishments; older students are role models for younger students. Abusive teachers and school employees are able to exploit these asymmetrical power relations, as are older students.



“Violence against children has incalculable costs to present and future generations and it undermines human development. We recognize that virtually all forms of violence are linked to entrenched roles and inequalities, and that the violation of the rights of children is linked to the status of women.”

The African Declaration on Violence against Girls, 2006<sup>3</sup>

Norms of behaviour reinforce gender inequalities within the school environment. For example, girls may be expected to undertake certain chores, such as cleaning, which are not expected of boys. Some teachers excuse fighting between boys or dismiss their teasing of girls, but expect modesty and demure interactions from girls. Deeply entrenched beliefs about sexuality and sexual behaviour contribute to a tolerance of some degree of force on the part of men and boys, while insisting on passivity from women and girls.<sup>4</sup>

When mechanisms for reporting, monitoring and responding to violence against girls in school are not in place and impunity is prevalent, gender-based violence is more frequent. When girls report cases of violence, particularly sexual violence, too often their behaviour is judged rather than that of the alleged perpetrator. Girls who complain of abuse are sometimes accused of having brought it on themselves by behaving flirtatiously, wearing provocative clothing or being in the wrong place. Others are ridiculed by their classmates or called liars by their former friends. They may be met with indifference by school administrators or encouraged to conceal the abuse by their parents.

Victims will understandably be less likely to report abuse if they fear further victimization, ridicule or inaction, and as long as perpetrators believe that they can commit their crimes without fear of punishment, the pattern of violence will not be interrupted.

© Stuart Freedman

Indigenous Mayan girls in Guatemala play a game of hand clapping at an education centre run by the non-governmental organization Save the Children. The girls are domestic workers and meet each other at the end of their day.









**Violence against girls is both a symptom and a result of the larger problem of gender inequality. It has to be tackled in all spheres.**

When officials are confronted with the fact of violence against girls, their response is frequently to impose stricter rules for what girls must do to “protect” themselves from violence – dress modestly, never travel alone, stay at home and so on. In the most extreme cases girls are themselves punished in order to “protect” them. For example, female genital mutilation is sometimes justified as a way to keep girls pure and without desire to explore their sexuality. Teenage girls may be punished, even killed by their families to restore the family honour if they have been the victim of abuse.

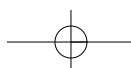
But the state has an inescapable obligation to prevent and address violence against women and girls, and to ensure universal access to primary education and equal access to secondary education. That obligation cannot be satisfied if the school environment means that girls go to school in a state of fear.

States have duties to ensure that none of their agents (including teachers and administrators) commit violence, that appropriate policies are in place to prohibit and deter violence, and that redress is provided if violations occur. The failure to meet these obligations cannot be justified by lack of resources. When officials fail to address violence in schools, they do so through a lack of political will.

## The time for action is now

This report examines violence in schools and its impact on girls’ right to education. It is based on information Amnesty International has received as well as information gathered from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) and academic sources. While it cannot provide more than an initial overview, it exposes the magnitude of the problem and the need for action to address it.

This report focuses on violence as an obstacle to girls’ access to education primarily because of the scale of needless suffering it causes and the urgent need for effective interventions. There are two other reasons for concentrating on this issue now.



First, violence against girls is generally under-reported. The situation in Haiti is not unusual. Amnesty International researchers found that everyone they interviewed believed that violence in schools is widespread, but there was no specific information on how prevalent it is. It is a taboo subject and very few cases have been reported. Although physical punishment is banned in Haitian schools, corporal punishment was commonly reported, including the use of whips, beatings with electric cables, and forcing children to kneel in the sun. Other forms of violence described by interviewees included food deprivation, sexual abuse of girls by teachers and administrative staff, and insults and psychological abuse of girl pupils. According to local NGOs, teachers and students ostracize girls that are victims of sexual violence and often girls change schools due to the shame associated with being a victim of sexual violence.

Second, the importance of stopping violence against girls has not been factored into the Millennium Development Goals relating to education. The Millennium Development Goals are important targets agreed by over 190 governments in 2000 to help eradicate poverty. The goals include calls for universal primary education and gender equality, but they measure progress by the number of girls in class, without seeking to address violence and discrimination that affect both the quality of girls' educational experience and their access to education.

**Education is a human right.  
Providing a safe environment,  
free from violence, is a  
government obligation.**

This study on violence as an obstacle to girls' right to education is part of a larger programme of work through Amnesty International's Stop Violence Against Women campaign. It will be followed by country-based studies of the problem, and targeted campaigning.

At the local level, many girls, women's groups and human rights organizations are taking action on this issue already. For example, in 2005, a group of girls in Sotouboua, Togo, formed a support group called Arc-en-Ciel. Their aim is to combat sexual harassment in school, work to reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS, and provide a setting where girls and young women can learn to defend their own interests.<sup>5</sup> The International Rescue Committee has introduced female classroom assistants into classrooms in refugee schools in West Africa, with an explicit mandate

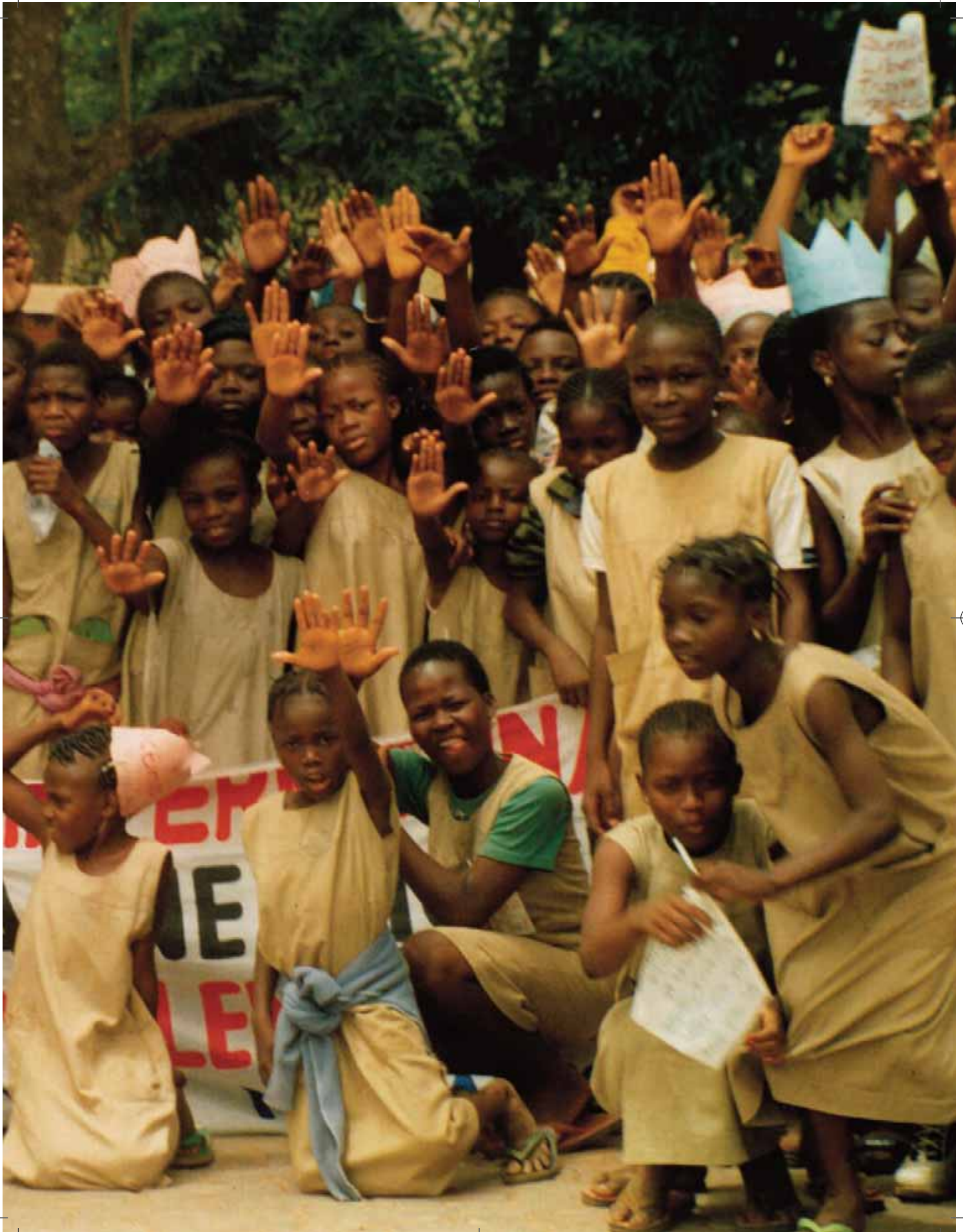


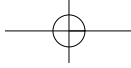
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Schoolgirls taking part in the launch of Amnesty International Benin's Stop Violence Against Women campaign in Porto-Novo, Benin, in 2004.

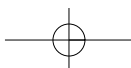






to mitigate abuse and exploitation of students and create more girl-friendly learning environments.<sup>6</sup> Another example is Program H in Brazil and Mexico, which focuses on helping young men question traditional norms related to manhood and promotes good health and gender equality.<sup>7</sup> The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), a pan-African NGO promoting girls' and women's education in sub-Saharan Africa, runs programmes to increase access and retention of girls in schools as well as to improve the quality of education for all girls.<sup>8</sup>

Amnesty International recognizes the determination of girls all over the world to gain an education. While we applaud all of the innovative and responsive initiatives to protect girls from violence and to provide services to girls who have experienced violence, we demand that states take immediate action to fulfil their international commitments and make schools safe for girls.



## TWO/ACKNOWLEDGE THE HARM, REDUCE THE DAMAGE

When a girl is fearful of or a victim of violence at school, understandably her school performance suffers. She may not be able to concentrate or focus on her studies and she may no longer see school work as a priority. If she has to come into contact with her abuser at school on a regular basis, her performance may suffer even more.

Violence in and around educational institutions is pervasive throughout the world. Many girls have come to accept teasing, bullying, sexually explicit jokes and gestures, excessive punishment, and even unwanted sexual activities as the price they have to pay for their education.

Such violence is pervasive, and is also gravely damaging. Violence against girls in and around schools is an obstacle to girls' access to education. It is demeaning to their self-worth, prejudicial against girls' educational outcomes, and has both immediate and long-term impacts on their mental and physical health as well as their social and economic independence.

Lack of education has lifelong consequences. For girls in particular, lacking an education reduces their opportunities for financial independence. It increases the likelihood that they will enter into early marriage, with its high incidence of emotional and physical ill-health. It significantly increases their risk of contracting HIV and of dying in childbirth. It makes it harder for them to navigate society successfully and claim their rights.

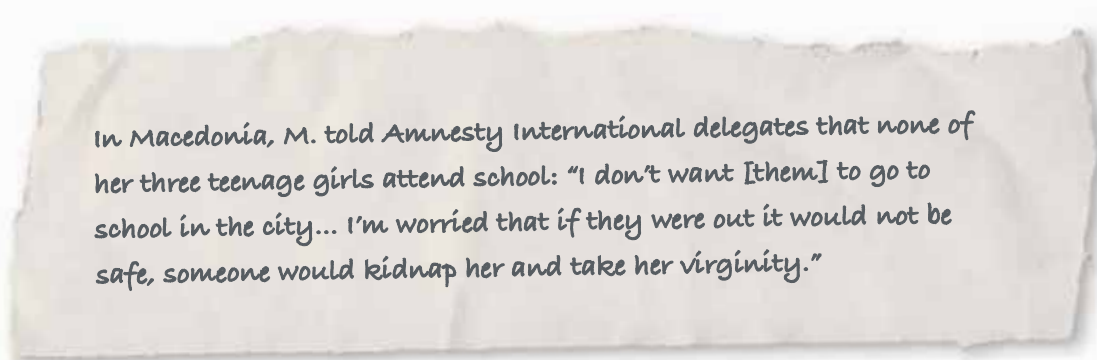
The interactions that take place among children and between children and adults set the tone for future relationships. If strict notions of femininity and masculinity are socially enforced by teasing, harassment or violence, lesbian, gay, bisexual and

**Women who have been sexually abused once are most likely to suffer it again. No less than 60 per cent of women whose first sexual experience was forced are subjected to sexual violence later in life.<sup>9</sup>**



transgender students may be unable to express their true identities. If a girl's early sexual experiences are forced, she then becomes more likely to experience violence later in life.<sup>10</sup>

In the long run, if violence against girls is unchecked, societies suffer as educational outcomes are poor and gender discrimination flourishes.



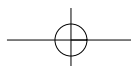
*In Macedonia, M. told Amnesty International delegates that none of her three teenage girls attend school: "I don't want [them] to go to school in the city... I'm worried that if they were out it would not be safe, someone would kidnap her and take her virginity."*

## Physical injuries and harm

A growing body of evidence from around the world indicates that gender-based violence against women and girls can lead to fatal outcomes, such as homicide, suicide and AIDS-related deaths.<sup>11</sup>

Violence against girls leads to a variety of physical health problems. These include injuries, from bruises and cuts to broken bones, serious disability and even death. Violence also leads to long-term ill-health, including chronic pain and gastrointestinal disorders.<sup>12</sup>

A 2006 UN report on violence against children found that studies from around the world consistently reported severe consequences from such abuse. For instance:





*"Tolerance of violence against children is a major obstacle to health and development in Europe. We cannot afford to let this violence continue unchallenged; we must act now to change the conditions that lead to the victimization of children."*

Dr Marc Danzon, World Health Organization's regional director for Europe.<sup>13</sup>

- a European study on depressed children found that corporal punishment was the strongest past predictor of current depression;
- a study from Cameroon found that corporal punishment in the home and at school blocked the development of social skills, with victims likely to become passive and overly cautious, fearing free expression of their ideas and feelings and in some instances becoming perpetrators of psychological violence themselves;
- both victims and perpetrators of bullying tend to get lower marks than other children;
- a study in Nepal found that 14 per cent of dropouts could be attributed to fear of the teacher;
- studies in South Africa found that victims who reported sexual violence were met with such hostility that they left school for a period of time, changed schools, or quit school entirely;
- studies in African, Asian and Caribbean countries found that pregnancy resulting from sexual assault and coercion often forced girls to quit school.<sup>14</sup>

When a girl is disciplined by being beaten with a stick, is sexually assaulted by one of her peers, or is targeted with an acid attack, the pain she endures is undeniable and unacceptable. But whatever the abuse, whether it is committed by fellow students or by adults, its severity cannot be measured solely by the physical pain inflicted. The size of the physical scar on the child's body is easier to measure than other consequences of violence, but the damage to the child's sense of integrity and well-being can be far more lasting.

*Girls have been attacked by having acid thrown at them in certain South Asian countries. These acid attacks have been associated with a number of factors, including family or land disputes, dowry demands and rejection of a man's advances. The Acid Survivors Foundation in Bangladesh estimates that 27 per cent of acid attacks in Bangladesh are against children and states that some attacks take place in schools.<sup>15</sup>*

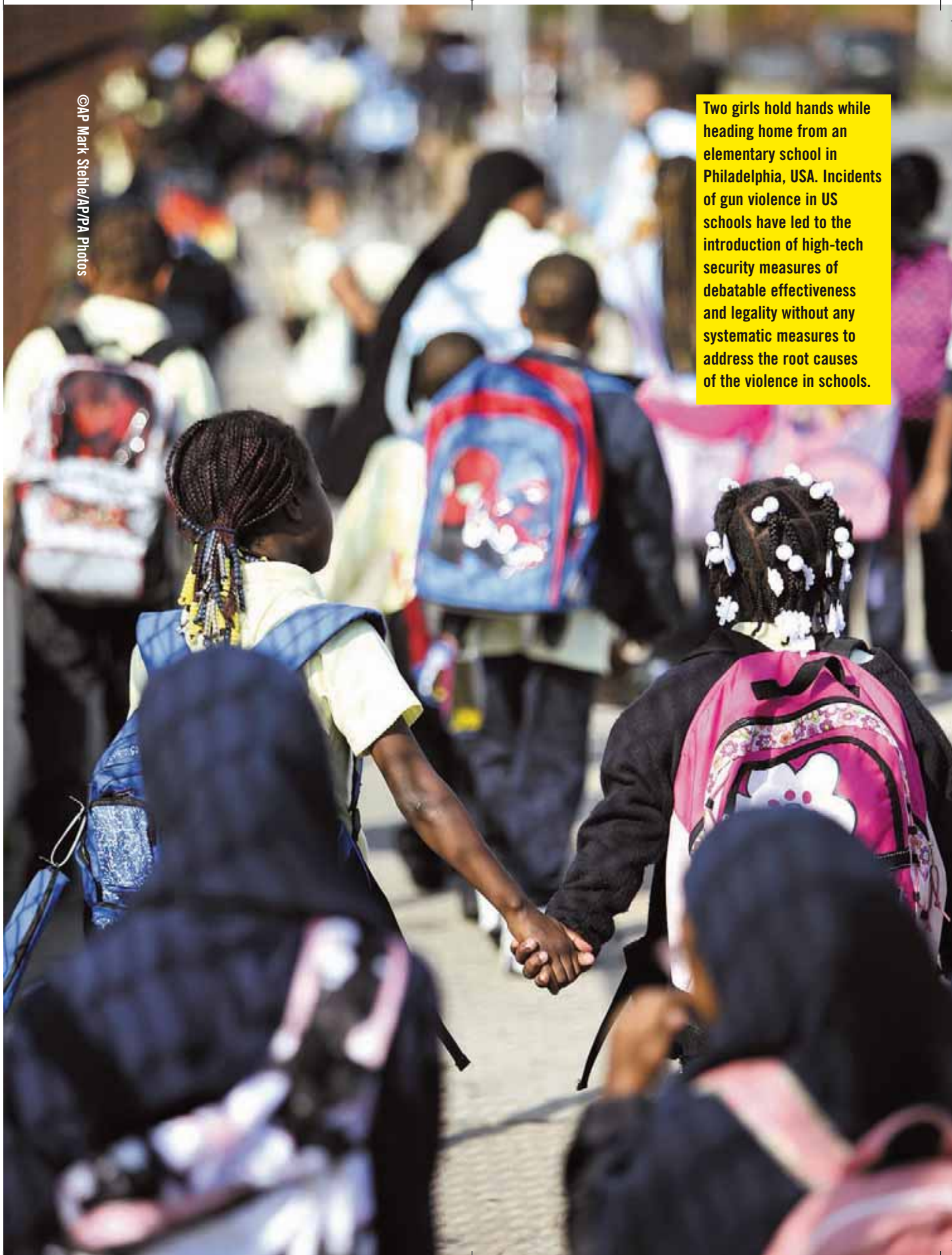
## Sexual abuse and exploitation

*My teacher last year scared me because he put pressure on me to have sexual relations with him.... When I told my parents, they didn't do anything against the teacher. They didn't even tell the principal. They are scared of teachers. They think they are inferior to teachers. Now I am scared at school, and I miss class often.*

A student in Benin (quoted in B. Wilbe, "Making School Safe for Girls: Combating Gender-Based Violence in Benin")

©AP Mark Stehle/AP/PA Photos

Two girls hold hands while heading home from an elementary school in Philadelphia, USA. Incidents of gun violence in US schools have led to the introduction of high-tech security measures of debatable effectiveness and legality without any systematic measures to address the root causes of the violence in schools.



Sexual harassment of girls in school occurs around the world. A study in the USA found that 83 per cent of girls in grades 8 through 11 (aged around 12 to 16) in public schools experienced some form of sexual harassment.<sup>16</sup> According to a 2006 study of schoolgirls in Malawi, 50 per cent of the girls said they had been touched in a sexual manner “without permission, by either their teachers or fellow schoolboys”.<sup>17</sup> In Latin America, sexual harassment in schools has been found to be widespread in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama, among other countries.<sup>18</sup>

Sexual abuse “may be particularly common and extreme in places where other forms of school violence are also present,” according to the 2006 UN report on violence against children.<sup>19</sup>

Forced sexual activity and intercourse for young girls can cause numerous health complications, including fistula, pelvic inflammatory disease and other gynaecological disorders. Sexual violence leads to a host of additional consequences: the risk of

*The non-governmental organization Plan Togo reports that sexual harassment and abuse of girls by teachers is so common in Togo that an entire vocabulary has evolved to describe it. The phrase *notes sexuellement transmises* (sexually transmitted marks or grades) is used to refer to good marks that are the result of a sexual relationship with a teacher. *Cahier de roulement*, literally a shared exercise book, describes a girl who is presumed to have sex with several teachers. And BF, a brand of soap, is used in school to mean *bordello fatiguée*, a girl who is thought to be exhausted from numerous sexual relationships with teachers.<sup>20</sup>*



*The Constitutional Court of Colombia found that excluding a pregnant girl from mainstream education against her will constituted a form of punishment that violated her rights: "The transformation of pregnancy – through school regulations – into grounds for punishment violates fundamental rights to equality, privacy, free development of personality, and to education."<sup>21</sup>*

sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, sexual dysfunction, chronic pelvic pain, and unsafe abortions.<sup>22</sup>

Unwanted pregnancies and pregnancies in very young girls may result from school-related gender-based violence. Accounts of teachers impregnating their students emerge from all over the world, as do reports of girls becoming pregnant from assaults by older boys or "sugar daddies", older men who give them gifts or cash. Despite policies in some regions of allowing young mothers to return to classes after the birth, most often a pregnancy marks the end of a girl's schooling and the curtailment of her opportunities for social and economic independence.

Unintended pregnancy can have serious repercussions – unsafe abortions, suicides and family reactions that may include social isolation, ostracism or even murder. Unsafe abortions sought to end unwanted pregnancies also have many health complications, including the risk of death, for teenage girls.

According to Tanzania's Minister for Education and Vocational Training, Margaret Sitta, more than 14,000 primary and secondary schoolgirls were expelled from schools between 2003 and 2006 because they were pregnant. She cited poverty



**A teacher tries to convince a girl to go to school in a deprived area in the city of Van in eastern Turkey as part of a national campaign to bring more girls from poor and rural areas into the classroom. Traditional practices mean that girls are called upon to do chores and tasks not expected of boys, which restricts their attendance at school.**

as a factor pushing girls into the hands of unscrupulous men, as well as rape, lack of proper parenting, early marriages and distance from school as causes.<sup>23</sup>

Early marriage is clearly linked to early sexual activity, a form of sexual violence. It has also been linked very clearly with drawing girls out of school. In that sense it is a form of violence against girls which impacts on their right to education.<sup>24</sup>




©AP Photo/Burhan Ozhilici



## Emotional and psychological damage

Victims of school-related violence report a range of emotional and behavioural impacts, including the inability to sleep, loss of appetite, depression, anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, negative feelings about themselves, aggression, suicide attempts, alcohol and drug abuse, and high-risk sexual activity. Depression is one of the most common consequences of sexual and physical violence against girls.



*A survey carried out in Jamaica in 2005 found that 66 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women agreed with the statement "women and girls sometimes bring rape upon themselves."<sup>25</sup>*

Verbal abuse by teachers has been shown to lead to low self-esteem in students,<sup>26</sup> as does discrimination against female students by teachers who believe girls are not as clever or energetic as boys.

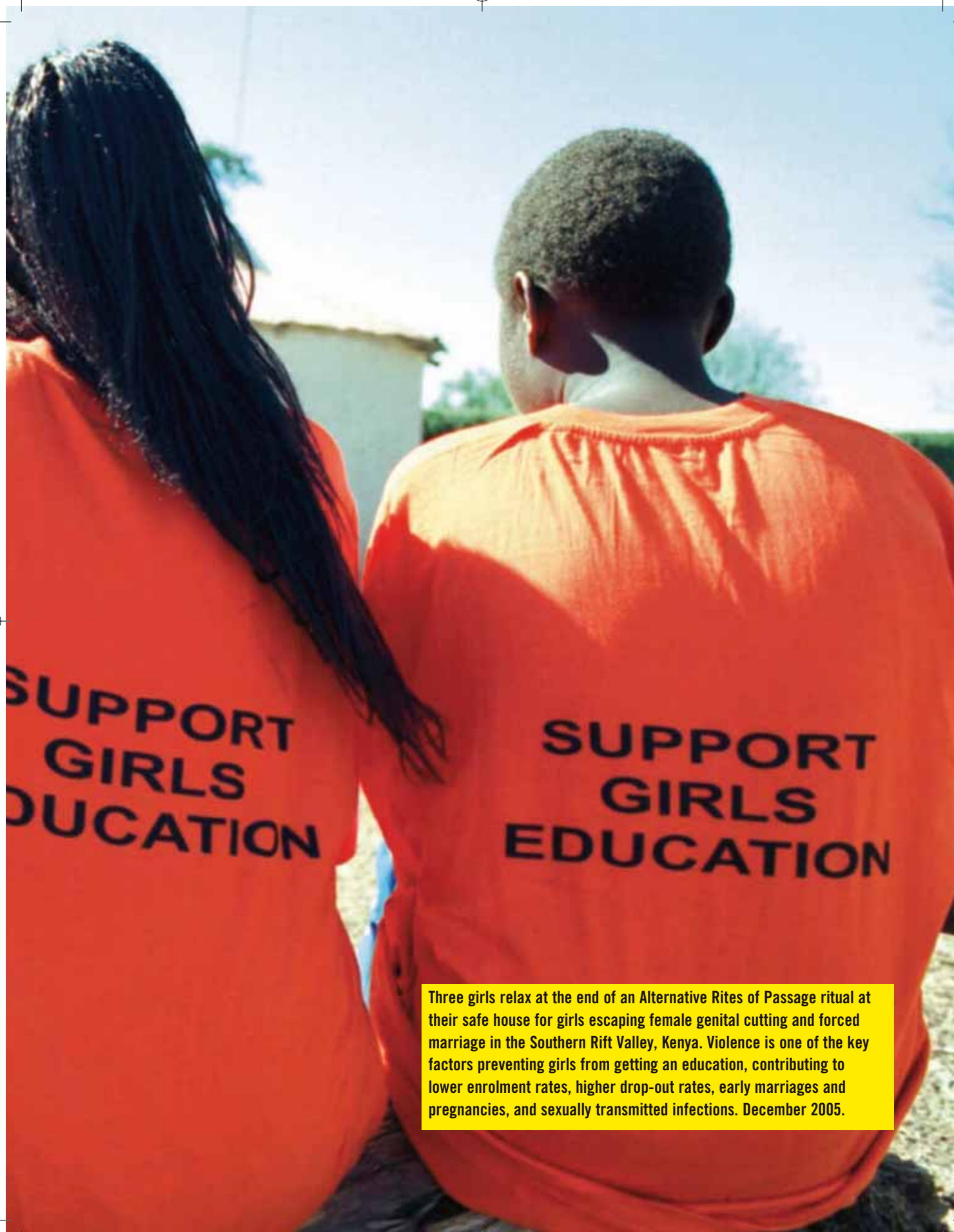
## HIV prevention impaired

Education is a vital element in efforts to stop the spread of HIV and AIDS. When violence against girls in schools leads to them dropping out or not participating fully, it prevents them from acquiring an education that would decrease their vulnerability to HIV infection. Access to quality education is a key step towards ensuring that as adults, women enjoy economic independence and therefore may be better able to negotiate the terms and conditions of their sexual interactions – including practising safer sex.

Every human being is entitled to the highest attainable standard of health, a right that includes the right to health education and information. Not only are schools a







Three girls relax at the end of an Alternative Rites of Passage ritual at their safe house for girls escaping female genital cutting and forced marriage in the Southern Rift Valley, Kenya. Violence is one of the key factors preventing girls from getting an education, contributing to lower enrolment rates, higher drop-out rates, early marriages and pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. December 2005.



place where health information can be provided to children and adolescents, but education enables people to understand and act on the health information they receive. Denial of the right to education therefore undermines the right to health.

In addition, sexual assault against girls in or around schools carries the danger of HIV infection. In countries where HIV is prevalent and there are high levels of sexual violence, women and in particular girls are at risk of contracting HIV as a consequence of rape. In violent relationships, preventive behaviours are less likely, and pressure or coercion may also be linked to a substantial age gap between partners, such as a young girl with an older student, teacher or “sugar daddy”.<sup>27</sup>

**The Global Campaign for Education has estimated that universal primary education would prevent 700,000 new cases of HIV each year.**

Forced sexual activity and intercourse for young girls can also cause numerous reproductive health complications.

Girls living with HIV may be excluded from school, or may face stigma, harassment and assault within school. And when relatives fall ill from AIDS, girls are generally the ones who stay at home to care for them.

Widespread sexual violence against women and girls, followed by very high rates of HIV infection, has been seen in many armed conflicts. For example, of the 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls who survived rape and other sexual violence during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, seven in ten are now living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>28</sup>



# THREE/MAKING SCHOOLS SAFER – WHERE ARE THE DANGERS?

## The journey to school

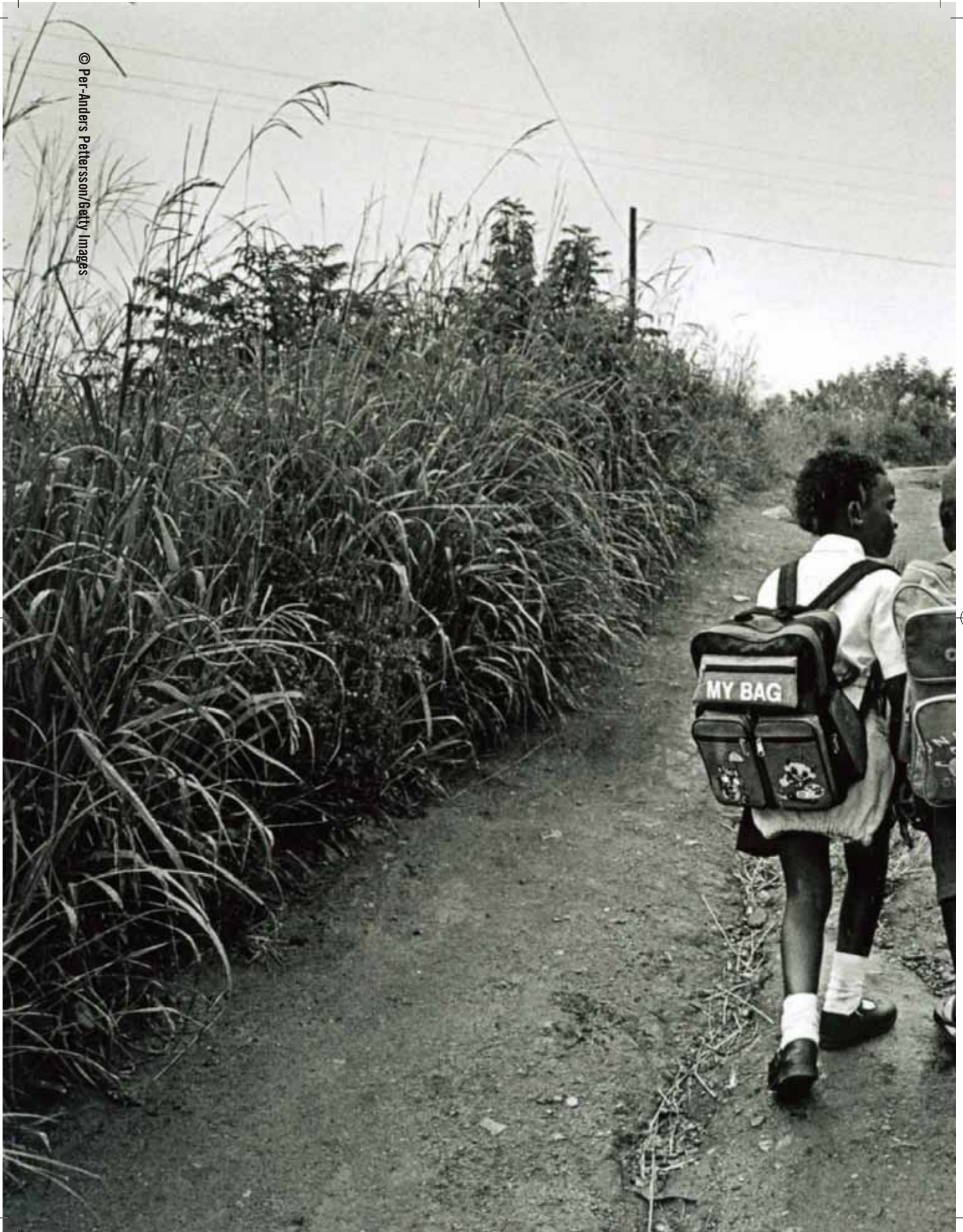
Travelling to and from school can be risky for girls and young women. Girls report incidents of being groped, men squeezing up against them on crowded buses and trains, name calling and propositioning. More serious assaults, including rape, are also reported. In a survey of girls in Zimbabwean junior secondary schools, 50 per cent of girls reported unsolicited sexual contact on the way to school by strangers, and 92 per cent of girls reported being propositioned by older men.<sup>29</sup>

The risks increase if the journey is long, if they travel on foot or if they have to travel after dark. In San Salvador, El Salvador's capital, for instance, girls who work in domestic service frequently cannot attend classes during regular school hours. Those who attend night classes reported that their routes to and from school can be unacceptably risky during the times they must travel.<sup>30</sup>

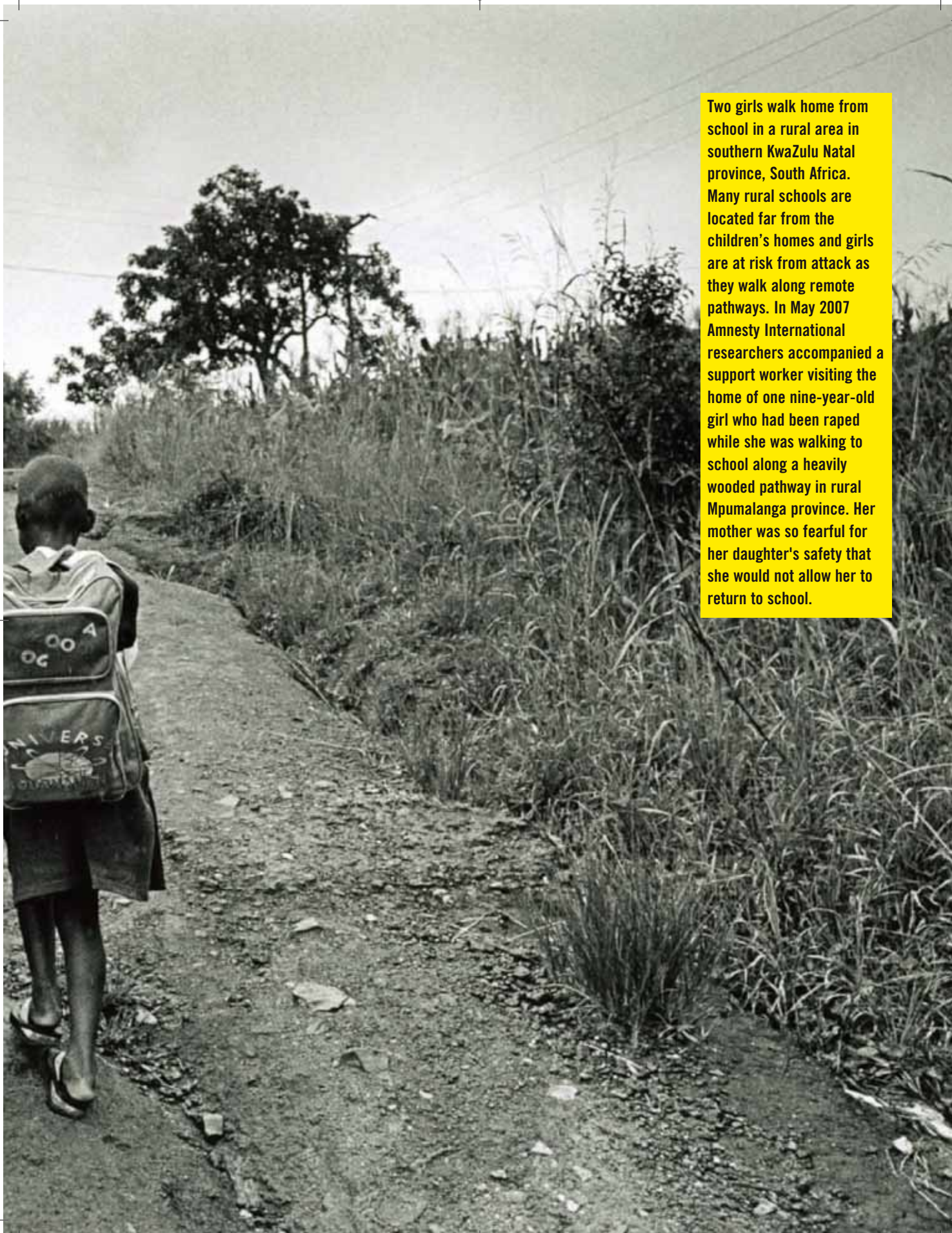
The longer the journey, the greater the risk of harassment or assault en route to school. In many countries, including in parts of Pakistan and India for example, when girls reach secondary school, many will face a much longer journey because there are fewer schools and they are situated far from villages.

For some girls, the distance to school is so great that they must live away from their family home. In Fiji, where the lack of schools near their homes means that many children live with members of their extended families in order to attend class, a study found that of those girls who dropped out of school, 26 per cent reported having been sexually abused by male relatives while they were living away from home.<sup>31</sup>









Two girls walk home from school in a rural area in southern KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa. Many rural schools are located far from the children's homes and girls are at risk from attack as they walk along remote pathways. In May 2007 Amnesty International researchers accompanied a support worker visiting the home of one nine-year-old girl who had been raped while she was walking to school along a heavily wooded pathway in rural Mpumalanga province. Her mother was so fearful for her daughter's safety that she would not allow her to return to school.

"I was going to school. I noticed that a young woman near the schoolyard was watching me. I stopped by a burek (filled pastry) place and took a look inside. The strange woman approached me and offered me a burek. She paid for it. This lasted for some days, until we became friends. One day she suggested we have a ride with her in her car. I went with her... I was... Kept in a motel for three weeks in a row. Four men raped me. I was yelling, but no one could hear me since my mouth was closed. Other men came too... I couldn't continue with school... I feel ashamed and I feel like everyone is watching me as though I am a criminal."

Testimony of a 13-year-old Kosovo Albanian girl<sup>32</sup>

In many countries, young women of school age are at risk of trafficking for forced prostitution, and the journey to and from school may be where they are most vulnerable. Amnesty International has documented cases from Kosovo where the lack of security, and the failure of school authorities to take preventive measures or train girls in how to avoid risks and protect themselves, means that girls continue to be trafficked. In some cases parents prevent them from going to school because of the danger.

For Palestinian girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israeli army checkpoints, blockades and other restrictions on movement continue to severely hinder their access to education. Transport costs have risen sharply because the same journey now involves making long detours and taking several vehicles between the various checkpoints. The increased costs, the increased length of the journeys and the risk that students may be unable to return home due to closures and curfews has affected female students even more than their male counterparts. Given the significant deterioration of the economic situation, more families are choosing to prioritize the education of their sons, and some families are unwilling to allow their daughters to be exposed to the risks of being stranded at a closed checkpoint and unable to return home at night.<sup>33</sup>

## At school, at risk

Bullying, teasing, sexual harassment and physical abuse of girls on school grounds and in the classroom are reported from all over the world. A seven-year survey of more than 3,000 children in the UK found that more than half had experienced bullying or assault. Most incidents reported were low-level crimes that took place in school.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes clusters of boys intimidate or assault girls. Boys tend to “colonize” certain areas in schools where they engage in violent play; girls learn to avoid these areas for their own safety.<sup>35</sup>

Boys may tell offensive sexual jokes and use sexual gestures around young girls. This type of sexual harassment, known by the innocuous-sounding term “eve-teasing” in South Asia, is widely reported in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.<sup>37</sup> Girls in the UK reported boys calling them names like “prossie” [prostitute], and grabbing or fondling them.<sup>38</sup>

In Zimbabwe, a ritual has developed where older boys “propose” to new girls either directly or by writing notes, often sent via a friend. If a girl turns down such a proposal, she may be subject to threats and violent behaviour.<sup>39</sup> Students in Jamaica reported that sexual harassment, pressure to engage in sex, and touching of breasts and buttocks by peers is so common that it is seen as ordinary by both girls and boys.<sup>40</sup>

Latrines (communal toilets) and washrooms can be dangerous areas. Recently, for example, it was reported that a 16-year-old girl in Greece was sexually assaulted for an hour in the washroom of her school by four boys, while three girls looked on and one filmed it on her mobile phone. The girl says that the rape was accompanied by racist insults (she is Bulgarian).<sup>41</sup> The dangers increase where there are no separate latrines for girls, as is the case in many African schools.

Security in boarding schools may be inadequate. For example, the Human Rights Commission of Nepal raised the case of two blind girls who were continuously raped by a hostel warden for several years.<sup>42</sup>

**According to the World Health Organization, the most common place where sexual harassment and coercion are experienced is in school.<sup>36</sup>**





© AP Photo/Marco Di Lauro

**Afghan schoolgirls at the Maru Chera school for girls, where 600 girls are registered, in central Kabul. Although schools for girls have reopened in parts of Afghanistan, many girls are still missing out on a formal education. The reasons for this are complex and include attacks on schools and teachers resulting in school closures, as well as parents' reluctance to send their children to school for fear of attacks. Cultural factors also play a part – many parents don't believe education is necessary for girls once they reach a marriageable age.**

Classrooms should be oases of learning, where girls become empowered and gain the skills and knowledge needed to advance themselves and gain economic independence. However, all too often girls are subjected to verbal degradation, humiliating punishments, unequal treatment, and even assault in the classroom. Rather than protecting and supporting girls, some teachers are in fact the instigators and perpetrators of the abuse.

Some teachers turn a blind eye to the bullying or harassing of girls in the classroom, and to boys shouting and disrupting girls' attempts to participate. Girls who are of a different ethnicity, poor, disabled, less "feminine" or in any other way distinguished from the norm are particularly targeted.

Abuse against girls often takes on an explicitly sexual character. In biology class, for example, boys may use sexually explicit language and drawings to embarrass girls.

Some teachers take advantage of the daily opportunities for close physical contact with their students. For example, a teacher may put his arm around a girl on the



pretext of helping her with an exercise, or he may touch her while pretending to admire her clothing. A teacher's intentions may be uncertain, or he may openly pursue a girl in the classroom setting.

A US-based organization dedicated to the detection and prevention of school violence reported that in just 10 days in early 2007, 18 cases of sexual assault at school occurred in US schools. Some of the incidents they uncovered include:

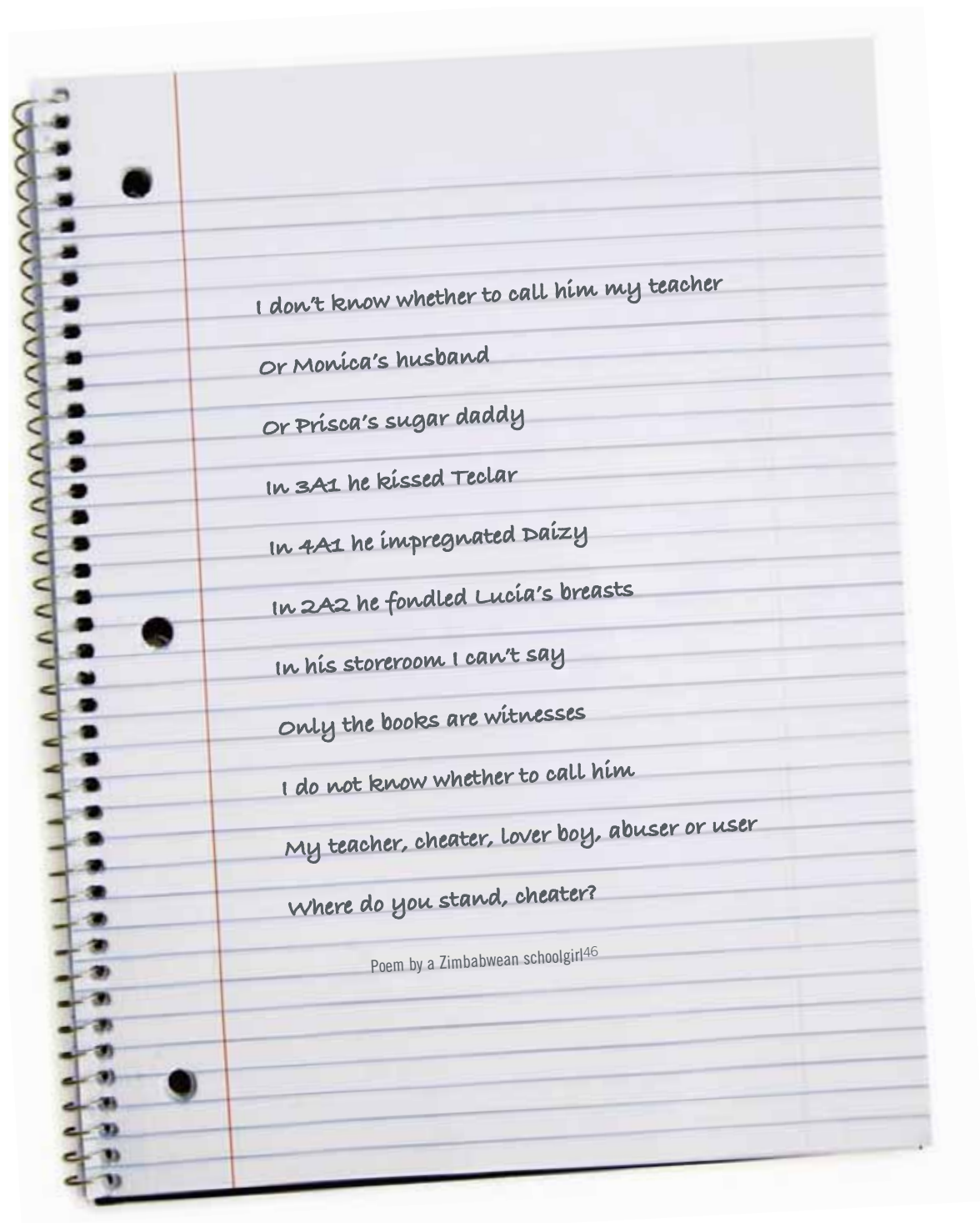
- In Mission, California, a 16-year-old student was the victim of a sexual assault by a school district computer technician who had allegedly spent a great deal of time enticing the student.
- In Groveton, Texas, three male students aged 15 to 17 were charged with aggravated sexual assault after taking a 13-year-old student to the school's field house and sexually assaulting her.
- In Urbana, Illinois, a second grade teacher was arrested on charges of sexual abuse of his students. Three students were allegedly blindfolded and played sexual games with the male teacher.<sup>43</sup>

Students from different regions of the world report incidents of teachers offering good grades to students to acquiesce to their requests for sexual favours, attempting to entice girls with offers of snacks or money, or threatening failing grades to those who do not respond.

Female students are often called upon to do chores and tasks after school hours that are not asked of boys. These tasks take children away from their families and friends and interfere with their ability to study and complete their assignments. Moreover, they may put girls at risk of sexual exploitation. A student from Uganda recounted: "[He made us] wash his feet, take water to the bathroom for him, but sometimes he would be naked and ask you to help him as a man."<sup>45</sup>

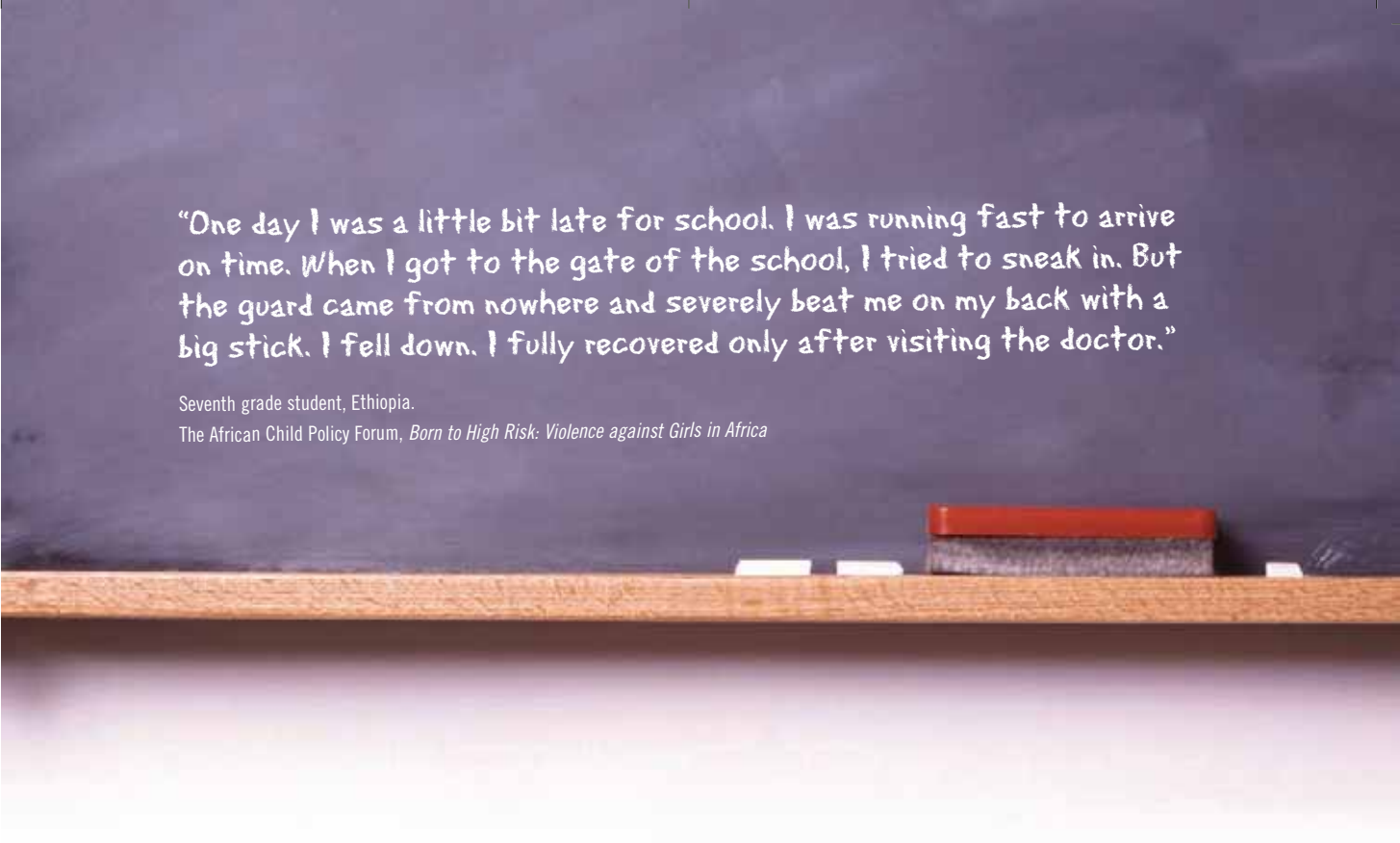
**Educators play a key role with respect to violence against girls. In some instances they are perpetrators, while in others they protect girls' rights.**

**Teachers are responsible for an alarming number of cases of sexual violence. The results of a national survey in South Africa revealed that 32 per cent of reported child rapes were perpetrated by a teacher.**<sup>44</sup>



I don't know whether to call him my teacher  
Or Monica's husband  
Or Prisca's sugar daddy  
In 3A1 he kissed Teclar  
In 4A1 he impregnated Daizy  
In 2A2 he fondled Lucia's breasts  
In his storeroom I can't say  
Only the books are witnesses  
I do not know whether to call him  
My teacher, cheater, lover boy, abuser or user  
Where do you stand, cheater?

Poem by a Zimbabwean schoolgirl<sup>46</sup>



"One day I was a little bit late for school. I was running fast to arrive on time. When I got to the gate of the school, I tried to sneak in. But the guard came from nowhere and severely beat me on my back with a big stick. I fell down. I fully recovered only after visiting the doctor."

Seventh grade student, Ethiopia.

The African Child Policy Forum, *Born to High Risk: Violence against Girls in Africa*

## Violence as punishment

In some schools, violence is institutionalized in the form of corporal punishment. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (the expert body that monitors the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) has described the variety of forms this method of discipline can take:

Most involves hitting ("smacking," "slapping," "spanking") children, with the hand or with an implement – a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices).<sup>47</sup>

Only 98 countries had prohibited corporal punishment in school as of June 2006, according to the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.<sup>48</sup>

Corporal punishment is seen as an acceptable measure of discipline in large parts of the world.<sup>49</sup> In every region, children consulted for the 2006 UN study on violence



© AP Photo/Hadi Mizban

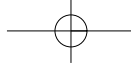
**An Iraqi girl walks to school through a Baghdad street strewn with debris following a bomb attack which killed at least 10 people. Killings and other human rights abuses continue to be committed on a daily basis in Iraq and education, particularly of girls, is an aspect of life that is under attack in such circumstances. April 2006.**

against children recommended that it address corporal punishment and other forms of cruel and degrading punishment in schools.<sup>50</sup>

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has authoritatively stated that corporal punishment is “invariably degrading”, does not respect children’s inherent dignity, violates children’s right to physical integrity, breaches the state’s obligation to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, and is incompatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>51</sup> The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires school discipline to be “administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity”.

Corporal punishment has also been denounced by other UN human rights bodies, including the Committee against Torture and the Human Rights Committee.





The Committee on the Rights of the Child told Swaziland in 2006:

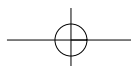
“The Committee is deeply concerned that corporal punishment is legal and traditionally accepted and widely practised in the family, in schools and in other settings. The Committee is further concerned that the new Constitution allows the use of ‘moderate chastisement’ of children.

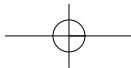
“The Committee recommends that the State party consider, as a matter of priority, amending the Constitution and explicitly prohibiting by law corporal punishment in all settings, including in the family, schools, the penal system and all alternative care settings. It also recommends that the State party conduct awareness-raising and educational campaigns to ensure that alternative forms of discipline are used, in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity”.<sup>52</sup>

## Schools in conflict zones

Forty per cent of the 77 million school-age children not attending school live in conflict-affected areas, according to a UNESCO study published in 2007.<sup>53</sup> The insecurity associated with armed conflict may keep parents from sending their children to schools and make it very difficult for school officials to protect children. More generally, armed conflicts with high civilian casualties often result in the devastation of the education system.

Additionally, in some recent conflicts, teachers and students have become targets. In 2006, the UN Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict warned that schools have “increasingly become the prime target of attacks by armed parties.”<sup>54</sup> In Colombia, for example, teachers have been targeted by all parties to the conflict – the security forces, army-backed paramilitaries and armed opposition groups.<sup>55</sup> At least 310 teachers were killed in Colombia between 2000 and 2006.<sup>56</sup>





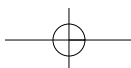
The types of attack that take place include: bombings, remotely detonated explosions and gunfire aimed at school entrances, playgrounds, offices and special events; targeted assassinations; destruction of education buildings; abduction, illegal detention, enforced disappearance or torture of students, teachers and officials; forced recruitment of child soldiers; and abduction and rape of schoolgirls and teachers by military forces.<sup>57</sup>

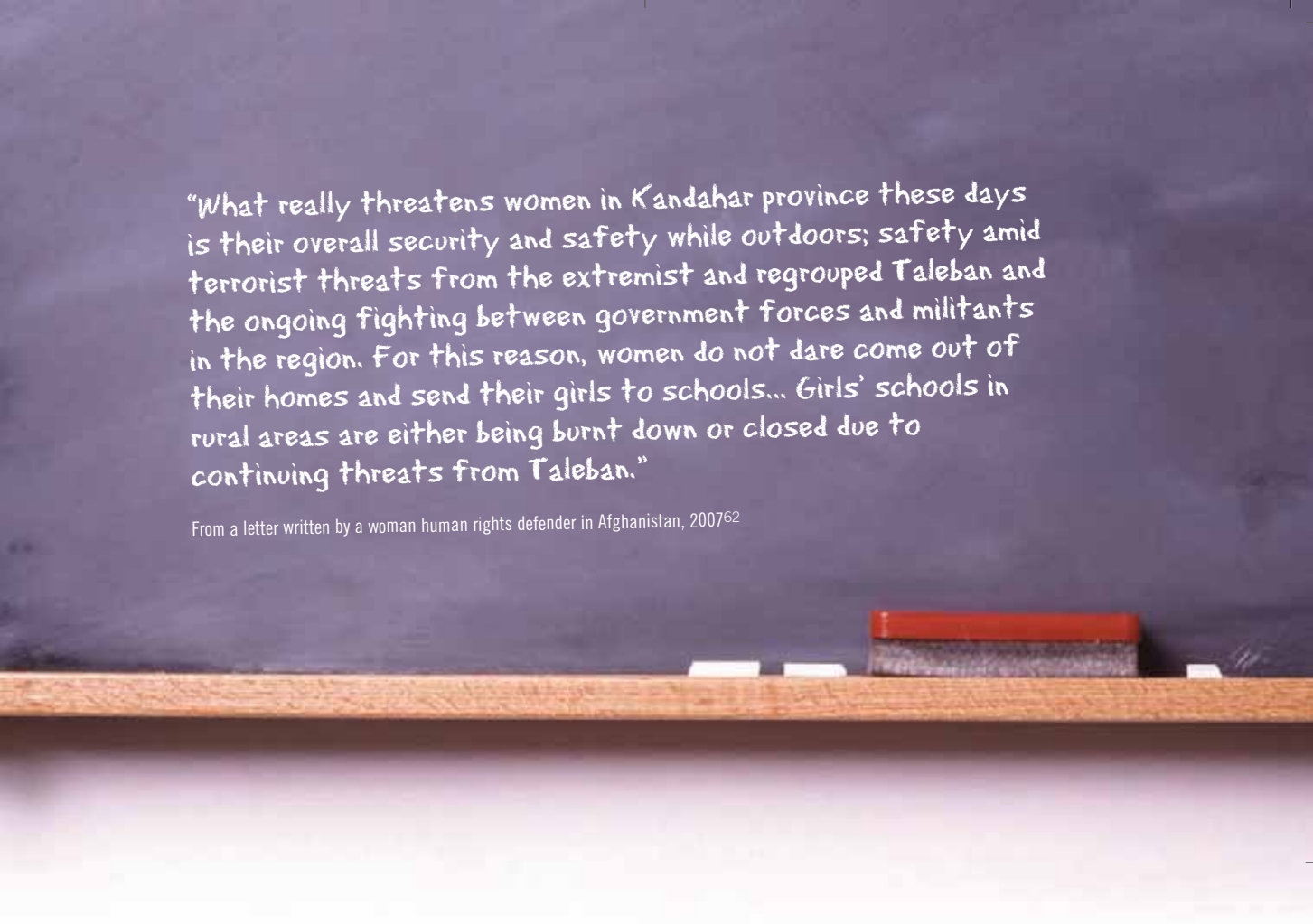
Where schools, teachers and students are targets of armed violence, the provision of education is disrupted in many ways. Students and staff may stay home because of fear of further attacks. School buildings and materials may be destroyed. Teachers may be irreplaceable in some regions. The psychological trauma, fear and stress caused by these attacks also hinder learning and teaching, affecting motivation and attendance of both staff and students.

In Sierra Leone, an estimated 1,200 schools were destroyed in targeted attacks during the civil war which ended in 2001. Three thousand girls were abducted and taken as “wives” (that is, as sex slaves). Many schoolchildren had their limbs amputated by combatants as part of a deliberate campaign of terror by armed groups.<sup>58</sup>

The Thai Ministry of Education stated in December 2006 that 71 teachers had been killed and 130 schools burned down in the previous three years. At least 112 teachers had been injured, and in the three southernmost provinces, 16 students died and 58 were injured in the same period.<sup>59</sup>

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conflict has raged for almost 10 years involving government forces, troops from several neighbouring countries at various times, and armed groups. Rape of women and girls by government security forces or armed groups has been widespread: in South-Kivu province 4,500 women and girls were raped in the first half of 2007, according to a UN expert.<sup>60</sup> Many of the victims are school-aged girls: in North-Kivu province, where dozens of rapes were reportedly committed in early 2006 during the occupation of Kibirizi by a renegade army brigade, the majority of the victims were girls aged from 12 to 18 and members of the Nande and Hunde ethnic groups.<sup>61</sup>





"What really threatens women in Kandahar province these days is their overall security and safety while outdoors; safety amid terrorist threats from the extremist and regrouped Taleban and the ongoing fighting between government forces and militants in the region. For this reason, women do not dare come out of their homes and send their girls to schools... Girls' schools in rural areas are either being burnt down or closed due to continuing threats from Taleban."

From a letter written by a woman human rights defender in Afghanistan, 2007<sup>62</sup>

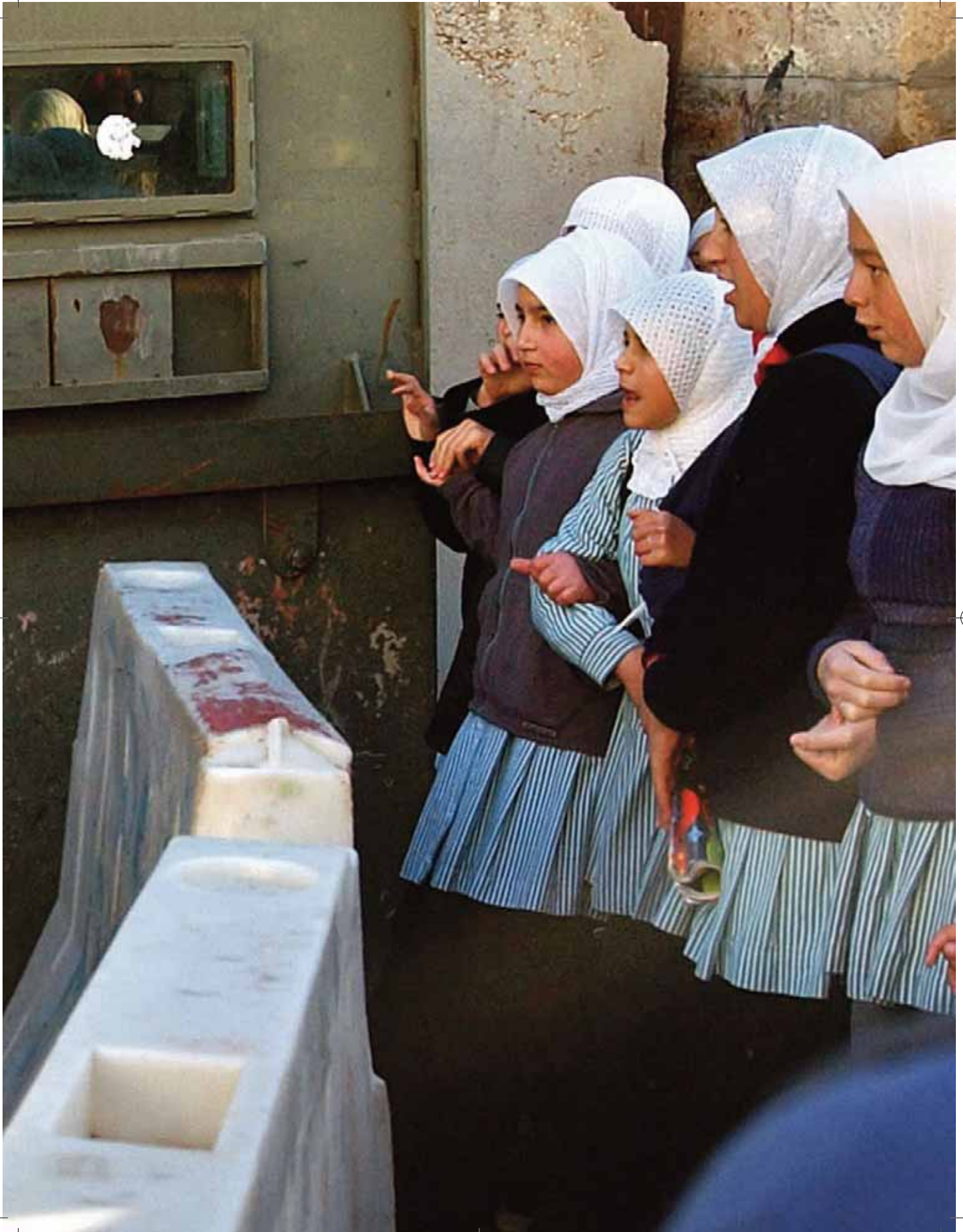
During the civil war in Nepal between government security forces and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which lasted from 1996 to 2006, tens of thousands of children were abducted from schools by Maoist fighters to attend "political education" sessions, and some were recruited for armed activities. Many children who might otherwise attend school were kept at home to avoid abduction. Hundreds of schools were shut down or destroyed, or used as barracks.<sup>63</sup>

In Afghanistan, burning down schools, particularly girls' schools, and threatening or assaulting girls who attend school have become increasingly common in recent years. At least 172 violent attacks on schools took place in the first six months of 2006. Attacks have been attributed to a number of different groups, including the Taleban and Hezb-e-Eslami, as well as local warlords and criminal gangs. Motives include undermining the authority of the central government and opposition to girls' education.<sup>64</sup> Between 2005 and 2006, 359 schools were closed in the provinces of



Palestinian schoolgirls at an Israeli checkpoint on their way to school in Hebron, November 2005.





"On Sunday, 5 March 2006, I went out with some classmates. ... some members of the CECOS (Command Centre for Security Operations) followed us. ... One of the CECOS members asked me to spend the night with him. I told him I was tired but he wouldn't have any of that. He brutalized me and undid my trousers, and I think I passed out. When they left, my friend's brothers came to find me and took me to hospital, where I learned that I'd been raped. ... I don't want to live in Alepe anymore, I've left the school I used to go to."

Catherine, a schoolgirl, raped by a member of the government security forces in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>65</sup>

Kandahar, Paktika, Zabul, Ghazni, Khost, Helmund, Uruzgan and Daikandi because of security concerns for children and teachers, denying access to education for around 132,000 children.<sup>66</sup>

In Iraq, the education system is "virtually on the point of collapse" with only 30 per cent of pupils attending school in 2006 compared with 75 per cent the previous academic year.<sup>67</sup> Many children have been killed in the continuing violence between armed groups, Iraqi government forces and the US-led Multinational Force, and more than 4 million Iraqis have been displaced from their homes causing immense disruption to children's education. Often, schools have been targeted for violence. On one day in January 2007, for example, a mortar hit a Baghdad high school, killing at least five girls, while a suicide bomber in Ramadi, north-west of Baghdad, killed two primary school children and injured 10 others.<sup>68</sup> Iraqi children are also targets for criminal gangs who kidnap them for ransom – not all of them from wealthy families. Parents are so worried that some are stopping their children attending classes. As well as children being killed and injured, the long-term effects on children's mental stability have yet to be assessed. A UNICEF spokesman said: "Iraqi children are commonly showing signs of trauma –

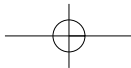
nightmares, anxiety, reclusiveness.”<sup>69</sup> Girls also face increasing pressure in many parts of the country to adhere to strict dress codes and codes of behaviour, which impact on their ability to participate fully in education.

In some conflicts, children are targeted for recruitment, whether by state armed forces or by other armed groups. In Northern Uganda, UNICEF estimates that 80 per cent of the members of the armed group Lord’s Resistance Army were abducted as children.<sup>70</sup> In Myanmar, 70,000 children were in armed forces in 2002.<sup>71</sup> While boys may be more likely to be recruited as combatants, girls are recruited both as combatants and also to provide services to the members of the group. In many cases girls are subject to sexual violence or “forced marriages” to soldiers. Schools may be explicitly targeted in these situations as places to find children. In Liberia, which saw very high rates of sexual violence during the civil war from 1989 to 1997 and again in 2003, young boys were forced to rape girls as an initiation rite for some of the armed groups.<sup>72</sup>

In refugee camps or other emergency situations, levels of abuse by humanitarian workers, including teachers, can be high. A ground-breaking 2002 report by UNHCR<sup>73</sup>/Save the Children UK highlighted how teachers were taking advantage of their positions and their authority over girls in camps in West Africa, offering good grades and other school privileges in return for sex. Reports continue of sexual exploitation, particularly but not exclusively of girls, by those who should be providing protection and services. This includes sexual violence and exploitation in schools. As refugees, the girls are economically vulnerable and highly dependent on external assistance. Because education is so critical to improving their situation, they are also desperate to succeed.<sup>74</sup>

In some countries the militarization of schools affects girls’ education. When students are regularly expected to do military training as a part of their education, this may change the school in terms of how it is seen by combatants and may affect security generally within the school itself. Levels of violence may increase either through hazing (initiation ceremonies) or through the use of weapons which might otherwise not be available.

**HIV/AIDS is compounding the problem of violence against girls. Sexual assault now carries the additional danger of HIV infections, girls living with HIV face discrimination, and girls are the first to be taken out of school to care for sick family members.**

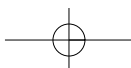


## Cyberspace

New information and communication technologies are being used increasingly by children and adolescents all over the world, adding a whole new type of violence to the list of dangers faced by girls. Cyberbullying, for example, occurs on the internet and via mobile phones. Bullies may send threats, impersonate others online, post defamatory or embarrassing personal information or photographs (real or doctored) and start rumours. In cyberspace, the bully can act anonymously, hiding behind a screen name, with little fear of punishment and a huge audience. The harm experienced by the victim therefore can be intensified as compared to more traditional bullying.<sup>75</sup>

Cyberbullying can be an extension of whisper campaigns and face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target. However, it differs from face-to-face bullying in its invasion of home and personal space; the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages and the size of the audience.

Recent research conducted in the UK by a Parliamentary Committee found that cyberbullying and “prejudice-driven” bullying were most commonly mentioned by witnesses.<sup>76</sup> A survey of 11,000 UK schoolchildren revealed rising levels of bullying via the internet or mobile phones.<sup>77</sup>





# FOUR/RISK FACTORS FOR VIOLENCE AND EXCLUSION

Violent acts are committed in schools around the globe, but some schools are more unsafe than others. Some girls are also more prone to suffer violence than others: particular groups, such as ethnic minorities, lesbians or girls with disabilities, are at higher risk than their peers. One factor which makes violence more likely is if teachers fail to react to verbal harassment and allow it to go unchecked. Other factors are unrelated to people's attitudes: distance to school, inadequate infrastructure and user fees and other charges for education may all increase girls' risk of exposure to violence.

## Discriminatory attitudes

*"If they are beaten at home, they are going to beat, that is, if their parents ill-treat them or don't talk to them, kids will beat others because they are beaten. They are going to drag with them what they see at home. This is the basis of violence."*

Adolescent girls, Latin America, 2005 World Report on Violence against Children<sup>78</sup>

In some communities, in the words of the African Child Policy Forum, "[v]iolence against women and girls is so much a part of society that those who experience it sometimes feel that it is their own fault. Many perpetrators of violence feel that their actions are justified by strong societal messages, which suggest that rape, battering, sexual harassment, child abuse and other forms of violence are acceptable."<sup>79</sup>

In Ethiopia, about 93 per cent of male student respondents in one research study confirmed that they knew violence against females is a criminal act and punishable

**"School is 'the place  
where wider discrimination  
in society finds  
its reflection'."<sup>81</sup>**

Europe and Central Asia Regional  
Consultation report for the UN study on  
violence against children.

by law. However, about 33 per cent of them believed that it is right for male students to get whatever they want, either by charm or by force, and about 21 per cent admitted to behaving this way themselves.<sup>80</sup>

Discrimination against girls and women on the basis of their gender is compounded by other forms of discrimination, such as that based on ethnicity, Indigenous status, sexual orientation or disability. For example, a study found that "While violence is a barrier to education for all girls, it may be more of an issue for girls with disabilities. Available data suggests that disabled girls experience violence within the family, institutions and community at higher rates than their non-disabled peers. And the violence they face may be more chronic and severe, taking some unique forms, such as withholding essential care."<sup>82</sup>

Lesbian girls are more frequently subjected to sexual harassment and threatened with sexual violence than their heterosexual peers. They also report that the harassment they experience takes different forms from the abuse faced by gay and bisexual boys. "Gay men get more physical threats; female students are more likely to get sexually harassed and be threatened with sexual violence. We'll hear things

*A safety inquiry at a high school in Toronto, Canada, brought to light a disturbing trend of violence against Muslim girls. A Muslim girl had been knocked down in the hallway and subjected to sexually explicit mocking by a male student; another Muslim girl was forced to perform oral sex on a male student in the washroom while another student stood guard outside the door. These attacks were identified as part of a series where little or no action was taken to protect the victims.<sup>83</sup>*

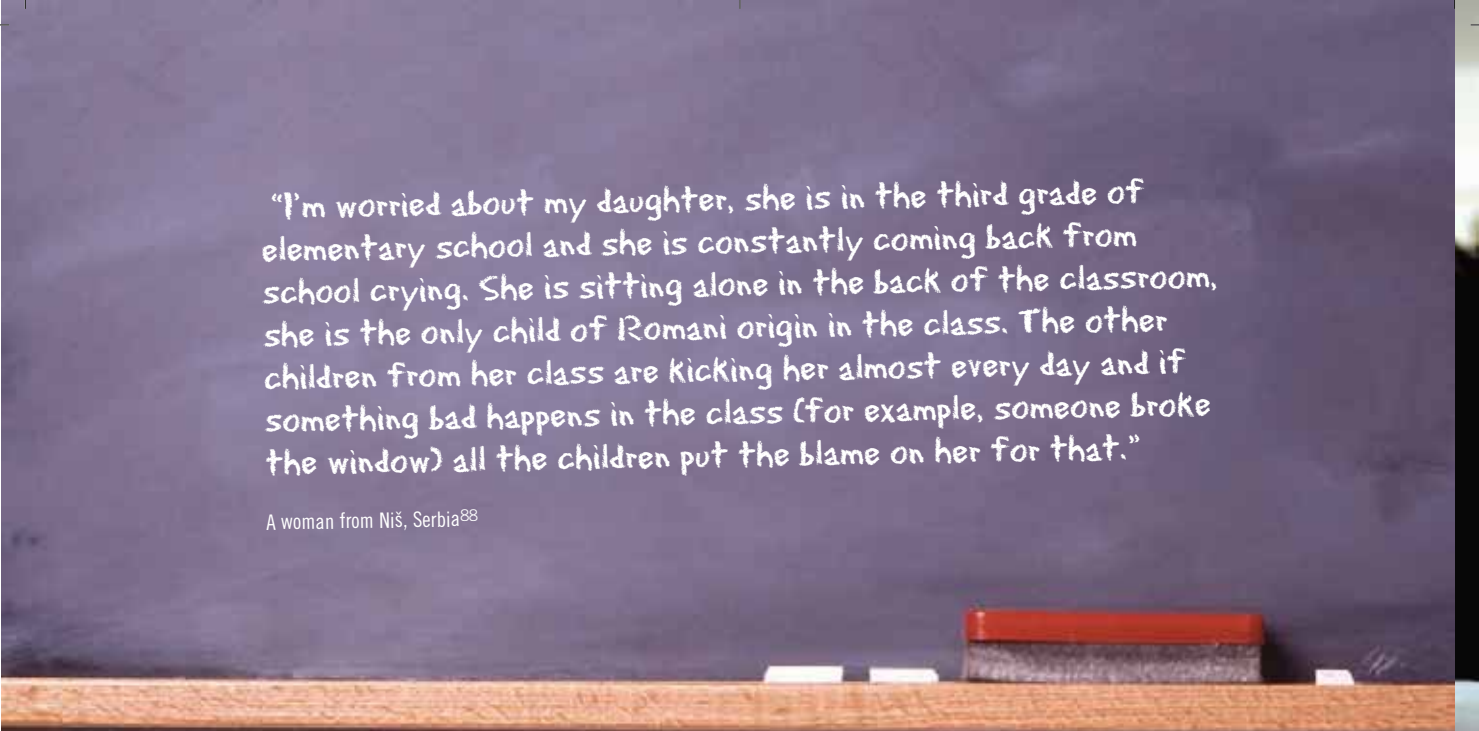


© Jenny Matthews

**Many girls suffer harassment or even violence if they are disabled. This school in Belize City receives support from the international charity Sightsavers, which works to combat blindness in developing countries.**

like, 'I can make you straight' or 'Why don't you get some of your girlfriends and we can have a party,'" a young lesbian in Texas, USA, told Human Rights Watch.<sup>84</sup> In a related phenomenon, girls who complain of sexual harassment may find that their sexual orientation is questioned. Surveys carried out by an NGO<sup>85</sup> in South Africa found that 14 per cent of gay men and lesbian women in Gauteng province and 19 per cent in KwaZulu-Natal province reported sexual violence at school, because of their sexual orientation.<sup>86</sup>

Girls who are members of racial or ethnic minorities or who are Indigenous may be targeted for violence and face particular barriers to education.<sup>87</sup> For example, Romani girls in several European countries face obstacles to education, including discrimination, high rates of poverty, patriarchal traditions which result in lower expectations for girls and early drop-outs, family obligations, and early marriages. In Slovakia, huge numbers of children are segregated into Roma-only schools, while others are placed in "special" schools despite not having any mental or learning disabilities. In some parts of eastern Slovakia, 100 per cent of schools are



"I'm worried about my daughter, she is in the third grade of elementary school and she is constantly coming back from school crying. She is sitting alone in the back of the classroom, she is the only child of Romani origin in the class. The other children from her class are kicking her almost every day and if something bad happens in the class (for example, someone broke the window) all the children put the blame on her for that."

A woman from Niš, Serbia<sup>88</sup>

segregated. Romani children often receive a second-rate education and have a very limited chance of progressing beyond compulsory schooling. In 2006, only 3 per cent of Romani children reached secondary school.<sup>89</sup>

Victims and survivors of violence, especially sexual violence, may be ostracized and excluded by their families, friends and communities. Girls from marginalized groups may find it even harder to pursue a complaint or access support services than others.

## Escalating behaviour

Countering discriminatory attitudes is important because violence does not occur in a vacuum. Violence in schools is both a product of discriminatory attitudes and a consequence of letting less serious behaviour go unchecked.

Teasing and fighting in and around schools are often dismissed by teachers and school staff as child's play, harmless enough. At a certain point however, it ceases to be mere play and becomes harmful. Before it becomes physically or psychologically





ICAP Photo/Bogdan Mares

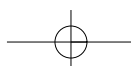
damaging, action needs to be taken. The behaviour must be stopped and an alternative must be taught.

Verbal harassment and other non-physical forms of harassment are damaging in themselves. According to the Europe and Central Asia Regional Consultation report for the UN study on violence against children, emotional and verbal abuse, including humiliation and stereotyping “may appear as minor forms of violence but can lead to other serious consequences. From the perspective of the child, these are the forms of violence that matter and those they feel most strongly.”<sup>90</sup>

For these reasons, early intervention is important. School authorities should not wait to respond until verbal harassment escalates into physical attacks. Nor should they accept the hostile climate that persistent verbal abuse can generate.

Investigating violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in US schools, Human Rights Watch found that “when teachers and administrators fail to

**Romani girls at school in Braila, Romania. Many Romani children face long journeys to school, and difficulties in studying or doing homework in cold, overcrowded homes. For children who do go to school, poor clothing marks them out as Roma and as targets for bullying and harassment.**

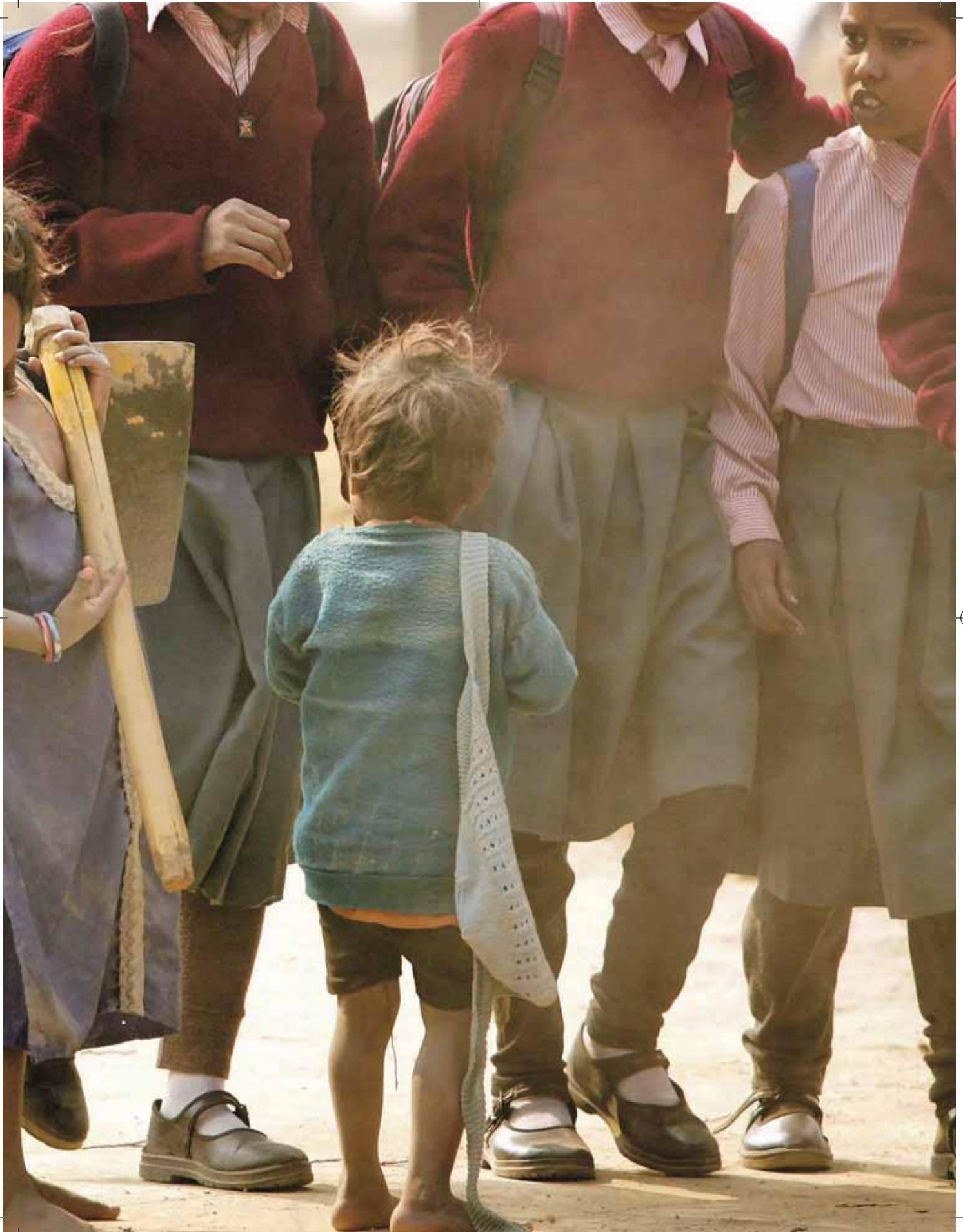


©AP Photo/Gurinder Osan)

The child of a road construction worker holds a spade as school children pass by in New Delhi, India. Despite the subcontinent's growing economic power, children from poor families have little or no access to even a primary education. UN studies confirm that investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty.







act to prevent harassment and violence, they send a message that it is permissible for students to engage in harassment, and they allow the formation of a climate in which students may feel entitled to escalate their harassment of gay youth to acts of physical and sexual violence.”<sup>91</sup>

## School fees

Under international law, primary education should be “available free to all”; the same provisions call for the progressive introduction of free secondary education.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, schools around the world commonly charge matriculation fees or levy other charges. These may be described as “voluntary” contributions, monthly quotas, examination charges or materials fees. Even where schools do not charge such fees, students and their families may have to cover other expenses associated with their education: transport, uniforms (in many countries, black shoes must be worn), and school supplies.

For education to be “free”, there must be no charges which can act as a barrier to accessing and completing, at least, compulsory education, which should last until the minimum age for employment. This should be no lower than 15 (or 14 temporarily).<sup>93</sup>

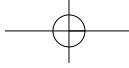
**Under international law,  
primary education should  
be available free to all.**

**International law also obliges  
states to move towards free  
secondary education.**

School fees keep many children out of school. In 2006, a major study showed the prevalence around the world of fees and other charges for education which should be free.<sup>94</sup>

In China, for example, where the central government has committed to providing free primary education, state schools still charge fees that make education unaffordable, particularly for children living in poor rural areas or the children of rural-to-urban migrants.<sup>95</sup> Women human rights defenders from across Zimbabwe interviewed by Amnesty International stressed the difficulties they faced in meeting school fees.<sup>96</sup> Women in the Solomon Islands told Amnesty International that they made hard choices to send only sons to school. They did not have enough cash income for school fees and believed that boys were more likely to require education for a job.<sup>97</sup>





The cost of education drives some children into harmful or hazardous child labour, including sex work, forced agricultural labour and factory work.

When the costs of education are steep, girls may consider sexual relationships which they would not otherwise, for example with “sugar daddies”. These exploitative relationships put girls at risk of physical and emotional injury, unsafe sex, unwanted pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

Studies sponsored by the UN women’s fund UNIFEM and by government aid agencies, for example, report that some girls in Fiji, Ghana and Jamaica engage in sex with older men in exchange for transport to school, school fees and other costs associated with their education.<sup>98</sup>

Poverty also leads many families to seek marriage for their daughters at an early age. Girls who marry young are less likely to continue their education.

Finally, in some instances the failure to pay school fees may be used by teachers or other school authorities as a justification for administering corporal punishment.<sup>99</sup>



## FIVE/NO EXCUSES FOR INACTION

All too often, authorities respond to violence in schools by choosing inaction. In many cases, they do so contrary to national law or school policies. In some countries, authorities are genuinely hampered by a lack of legislation – in some Pacific Island countries, for instance, the law does not expressly provide for a minimum age for consent to sexual relations, impeding prosecutions.<sup>100</sup>

In the worst cases, the authorities are directly committing the acts of violence.

The failure to respond can fuel additional violence or permit verbal harassment to escalate into more serious acts of physical abuse by sending the implicit message that the perpetrators will not be punished

*In Serbia, discrimination and degrading treatment of individuals or groups are prohibited by the Law on Primary Schools. Despite this law, the European Roma Rights Centre found that none of 18 recorded cases of humiliating or degrading treatment at school, six of which were reported to be by teachers, were resolved. Without exception, complaints from Romani parents of humiliating or degrading treatment of their children at school prompted no action by the authorities.<sup>101</sup>*

"Although there is no mother who wants to expose her daughter to abuse, there are instances in which society forces her to act otherwise. In such cases mothers quietly look for the perpetrators and ask them to marry their daughters. The mothers think that it is better to deal with the abuse in a simple manner at family level because society is not prepared to tackle sexual abuse. This is our reality."

Mozambican mother<sup>102</sup>

There is no justification for official inaction. The state, and by extension its public officials – including teachers and school authorities – must promptly investigate reports of abuse, impose appropriate punishments on offenders, help those who have suffered from violence to recover from its physical and emotional effects, and take steps to ensure that such abuses do not recur.

Reports from around the world, however, reveal a tendency to downplay, ignore and even conceal acts of violence committed against girls in relation to their schooling. Many governments and school authorities have failed to put in place appropriate infrastructure and security measures to prevent violence. Often they have not developed comprehensive laws and policies to prohibit all forms of sexual harassment and violence against students, including sexual relationships between teachers or administrators and students. Rather than rushing to protect victims from further abuse and help them heal, the seriousness of the violations and suffering are often brushed aside. And finally, those guilty of abusing girls are not always punished – prosecutions are often not pursued, teachers and staff members do not necessarily lose their jobs, and boys are not disciplined in a way that matches the seriousness of their actions.

**Violence or the fear of violence is an important reason for girls not attending school. Besides being in itself an infringement of girls' rights, violence is also denying girls their right to education.**



**A young woman who escaped when a man tried to grab her on her way home from school is describing her experience to girls at a school in Naivasha, Kenya. Three years earlier, a non-governmental organization, Dolphin Anti-Rape And Aids Control Outreach, had visited her school, teaching girls how to defend themselves against rape.**

One of the factors that prevent girls from coming forward when they are victimized is fear – fear of retaliation, that reporting would be futile or that they won't be believed, of further violence, that their privacy will not be respected, or of negative reactions from their peers or their families. Students need a trusted, neutral person at their school to whom they can report in confidence. Many schools lack this role.

While many Ministries of Education have policies on school discipline and codes of conduct for teachers that outline procedures for disciplinary measures and prosecutions in cases of teacher misconduct, evidence points to widespread lack of enforcement. Often, efforts to protect the reputation of the school by keeping reports of abuse out of the public eye take priority. The only punishment a teacher guilty of sexual abuse is likely to face is transfer to another school.<sup>103</sup>



# SIX/INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Human rights are a concrete expression of the inherent worth of each and every person. They are the components that make up a dignified life, the minimum that we should all expect simply because we are people. Girls' rights are human rights. All forms of violence committed against girls are human rights violations.

Education is both a right in itself and a route to the enjoyment of other rights. It helps individuals develop to their fullest potential, participate more effectively in civil society, and defend themselves, their families, and others from the deprivation of their rights. As Paul Hunt, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, has observed, "The exercise of the right to education is instrumental for the enjoyment of many other human rights, including sexual rights and the right to the highest attainable standard of health... The right to education is a primary vehicle by which children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty, as well as other forms of disadvantage."<sup>104</sup>

Katarina Tomaševski, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, put it another way: "Education operates as a multiplier, enhancing the enjoyment of all individual rights and freedoms where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, while depriving people of the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms where the right to education is denied or violated. Without education, people are impeded from access to employment."<sup>105</sup>

The right to an education is guaranteed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other international and regional human rights treaties. Discrimination on the basis of sex or gender is prohibited by these and other treaties, including the International



© AP Photo/Michael Probst)

An eight-year-old girl writes "education, school, learning", Frankfurt, Germany.

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention against Discrimination in Education.

The right to education is also guaranteed in regional treaties including the European Social Charter, the European Convention on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Other rights guaranteed in international human rights treaties underscore the importance of the right to education, either by providing particular guarantees to

uphold the right to education or by recognizing particular areas of education as critical to secure those rights. The right to protection from harmful child labour includes protection from “performing any work that is likely to... interfere with the child’s education.”<sup>106</sup> The right to the highest attainable standard of health includes the right to health education and information – a linkage that is borne out by the growing recognition that health information can be a key preventive measure in stopping the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other diseases and reducing levels of maternal mortality.<sup>107</sup>

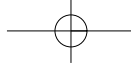
The right of children to protection from violence is explicitly guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is a key component of the general guarantee in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the right of children “to such measures of protection... required by [one’s] status as a minor.”<sup>108</sup> As the Human Rights Committee notes, this provision requires that “every possible economic and social measure should be taken... to prevent [children] from being subjected to acts of violence and cruel and inhuman treatment.”<sup>109</sup> The understanding that the guarantee of “measures of protection” includes protection from violence reflects the reality that the consequences of harassment and violence may include depriving children of other rights, including the right to education.

Having laws and policies that enable authorities to address violence in schools is an important first step towards guaranteeing these rights. But laws and policies are not enough in themselves; teachers, school authorities and other state officials must promptly respond to reports of violence with thorough investigations and appropriate punishment for those who commit abuses. The obligation to respond extends to situations when school officials know or should reasonably know of the risk of abuse, whether or not they have received a formal complaint. And when girls are subjected to violence, the state has an obligation to “promote [their] physical and psychological recovery... in an environment which fosters [their] health, peer-respect and dignity.”<sup>110</sup>

The international human rights law framework provides a powerful means of addressing violence against girls in schools because it points to specific obligations

**“There can be no compromise in challenging violence against children. Children’s uniqueness – their potential and vulnerability, their dependence on adults – makes it imperative that they have more, not less, protection from violence.”**

World Report on Violence against Children<sup>111</sup>



that governments have towards girls, mechanisms to hold governments to account if they fail to meet those obligations, and internationally agreed upon standards for evaluating their actions.

## Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are eight targets agreed by governments in 2000 to help eradicate poverty through action by developed and developing countries. They aim to move towards eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other preventable diseases, improving access to water and sanitation, improving living conditions in slums and ensuring that countries work together to eradicate poverty. The first Millennium Development Goal, equal numbers of girls in school as boys by 2005, has already been missed.

Stopping violence against girls has not been factored into the Millennium Development Goals relating to education. The goals include calls for universal primary education and gender equality, but they measure progress by the number of girls in class, without seeking to address violence and discrimination that keeps or pushes girls out of school or ensuring that their experience of education is empowering.

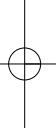
Goal 3, for example, calls for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, but the specific action point under this goal addresses the elimination of gender disparity – that is, unequal numbers of boys and girls – in primary and secondary education. The goals do not explicitly identify any structural barriers to education, including violence against girls. School attendance figures are not sufficient to assess progress in realizing the right to education – to realize the right to education governments must ensure that education is available, accessible, acceptable and adapts to girls in different situations.<sup>112</sup>







While supporting efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Amnesty International believes that to achieve gender equality in education requires increased commitment and an immediate effort to stop violence against schoolgirls.



# SEVEN/AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S SIX STEPS TO STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST SCHOOLGIRLS

All over the world girls face violence as they pursue their education. Some suffer long-term harm to their mental and physical health. Many more go to school in fear. The result is that countless girls are kept out of school, drop out of school or do not participate fully in school. Their human rights – rights to freedom from violence, to equality and to education – are violated.

Girls' rights are protected in international human rights law, as well as in national legislation. Governments are obliged to respect girls' rights, to protect girls from abuse by others, and to make girls' rights a reality. Teachers and school employees are agents of the state and share this responsibility. Others also have a part to play. Parents, community leaders and NGOs can support government and school efforts by participating in action plans, reporting violence and providing human rights-based training and services.

Stopping school-related violence requires challenging discrimination within schools and in the broader community. It demands listening to the voices of girls and taking into account their everyday experiences and needs. Amnesty International is therefore calling on government officials and bodies, including schools, in collaboration with all relevant parties, to take the following steps now.

**THERE CAN BE NO EXCUSES, NO EXCEPTIONS  
AND NO DELAYS.**

**Step 1: Prohibit all forms of violence against girls**, including corporal punishment, verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence, emotional abuse, and sexual violence and exploitation. Enact and enforce appropriate laws, policies and procedures.

**Step 2: Make schools safe for girls** through national plans of action to address school-related violence against girls. These should include guidelines for schools, compulsory training for teachers and students, the designation of a government official responsible for preventing and investigating incidents of violence and adequate public funding to address the problem. Ensure that schools have sex-segregated toilets and washrooms, secure dormitories, and supervised playgrounds and sports fields.

**Step 3: Respond to incidents of violence against girls** through confidential and independent reporting mechanisms, effective investigations, criminal prosecutions when appropriate, and provide services for victims and survivors. Ensure that all incidents of violence against girls are reported and recorded, and that people convicted of rape, sexual assault or other criminal offences against children are not employed in schools.

**Step 4: Provide support services for girls** who have suffered violence, including counselling; medical treatment; HIV/AIDS information, medication and support services; comprehensive information on sexual and reproductive rights; and support for reintegration into the school system of girls who are living with HIV or are pregnant, married or mothers.

**Step 5: Remove barriers to girls' access to school** by eliminating all fees, direct and indirect, for primary school, making secondary schools accessible to all, and developing programmes to ensure access for girls from marginalized groups.

**Step 6: Protect girls from abuse** by developing and enforcing codes of conduct for all school staff and students. Train school staff in early intervention strategies to address harassment and violence against girls in school.

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