

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 61st SESSION

Urgent Debate on "Protection of Children and Educational Institutions in International Armed Conflicts: The Aerial Attacks on Shajareh Tayyebbeh Girls' School in Minab, Iran, as a Grave Breach of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law"

27 March 2026

This report provides a summary of the positions expressed during the urgent debate of the Human Rights Council. It reflects the diversity of views presented by States, United Nations mandate holders, and other participants, without attributing legal findings or conclusions to the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue. References to potential violations of international humanitarian law or international human rights law are based on statements made by speakers and should be understood in that context. The Centre does not seek to adjudicate facts but to contribute to informed dialogue by presenting key elements of the discussion in a balanced and analytical manner, in line with international legal standards, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Mr Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, addressed the Council with deep concern over the bombing of Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School in Minab, emphasizing the devastating human cost of war, particularly on civilians. The attack reportedly killed or injured 168 pupils, teachers, staff, and their families. Conflicts cannot be resolved through the killing of children. International humanitarian law exists precisely to protect civilians, schools, and other civilian infrastructure during armed conflict. He called for a prompt, impartial, transparent investigation into this attack and for its findings to be made public to ensure accountability.

Mr Türk noted that attacks on schools worldwide are rising sharply, citing a 44% increase in 2024 that has left 52 million children out of school. Urgent steps are urged to safeguard educational facilities and those who work and study in them. Resorting to force during ongoing negotiations is condemned as a strategic failure that brings death, destruction, and long-term grievances, rather than sustainable peace.

Focusing on Iran, US and Israeli attacks have increasingly targeted residential areas and civilian infrastructure, including homes, medical facilities, schools, courts, transport networks, and energy installations across all 31 provinces. The Iranian authorities report over 1,900 civilian deaths and tens of thousands injured. He criticized the targeting of nuclear facilities as “reckless beyond comprehension” and raised concerns about compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

The UN Commissioner for Human Rights also highlighted internal repression in Iran, noting intensified crackdowns on dissent, arrests of hundreds of people, surveillance of journalists and activists, and a near-month-long internet shutdown. War does not relieve the Iranian authorities of their human rights obligations.

The escalating military situation in the Middle East and Gulf is described as highly dangerous, with risks of further civilian suffering and severe economic consequences, including poverty, hunger, and shortages of medicine and fuel. He called for an immediate halt to escalation, urging the US and Israel to cease attacks on Iran, Iran to stop attacking neighbors, and all parties to return to negotiations. The

overarching message emphasizes prioritizing the protection of civilians, preventing further suffering, and seeking sustainable peace, regardless of political divisions within the Council.

Ms Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education and on behalf of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures, focused on the urgent human rights and humanitarian implications of the US and Israeli military offensive against Iran. She strongly condemned the missile strike on Shajare Tayyeb Elementary School in Minab on 28 February, which killed at least 175 people, mostly children aged 7 to 12, while classes were in session. The school was largely destroyed, leaving families devastated. Attacks on schools are grave assaults on children, education, and entire communities, and constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law, potentially amounting to war crimes.

The attack on this school is not isolated: over 600 schools and educational facilities in Iran have been destroyed or severely damaged, over 230 students and teachers killed, more than 1,000 civilians dead, and three million displaced. Hospitals, World Heritage sites, and vital infrastructure have also been targeted, with attacks on oil facilities risking long-term public health effects.

Drawing on personal experience as a parent, she underscored the profound human cost of losing a child, highlighting the moral imperative for accountability. Schools are civilian objects, and children are explicitly protected under international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Intentional attacks on non-military educational buildings are war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute. Responsibility lies with the State that carried out the attack to conduct prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations.

Preliminary investigations indicate that the US military was responsible for the strike, using precision munitions aimed at the school, though outdated intelligence may have contributed to the targeting error. Proper verification of targets is a legal obligation, and questions remain about who in the chain of command is liable and how accountability will be enforced. Families of victims deserve a transparent, authoritative account and justice.

The speech stresses the importance of accountability for all violations of human rights and humanitarian law, welcoming the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran and the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict. State responsibility, including reparations such as rebuilding schools, providing trauma-informed education, and reintegrating affected children, is critical. Education itself can be a form of reparation and recovery for children impacted by war.

She warned against an "accountability gap" and urged that all avenues be explored to hold perpetrators accountable. The right to education remains fully applicable during armed conflict and provides life-saving protections, psychosocial support, and a sense of normalcy. Education must be treated as a core humanitarian priority alongside food, water, shelter, and healthcare.

While the immediate focus is on the Minab school attack, the human cost extends across the region. Protecting all civilians, ensuring access to essential services, safeguarding dignity, and providing justice for victims must remain central priorities. The Special Rapporteur concluded by calling for an immediate end to hostilities, full compliance with international humanitarian law, and global efforts to promote accountability, de-escalation, and lasting peace. The Special Procedures stand ready to support the Council in addressing these human rights implications, and the speaker expresses solidarity with the families and survivors affected by the attacks.

Ms. Mohaddeseh Falahat, the mother of two children killed in the attack on the Minab school, shared a testimony highlighting the profound and lasting impact of such incidents on families. She

described the sudden disruption of ordinary daily life and the enduring absence left by the loss of her children.

She emphasized the broader reality faced by many parents in conflict settings, where children are sent to school with the expectation of safety but are exposed to grave risks. Her intervention illustrated how such attacks affect not only individual families but also entire communities, leaving lasting psychological and social consequences. Personal belongings and everyday objects were described as reminders of lives interrupted and futures lost.

Her statement underscored that schools should remain protected environments dedicated to learning and development, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

She called on the Human Rights Council and the international community to ensure that such incidents are addressed through credible and impartial processes, emphasizing the importance of accountability, recognition of victims, and measures aimed at preventing recurrence.

H.E. Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran condemned the ongoing war against Iran, describing it as an illegal and unjustified aggression by the United States and Israel, two nuclear-armed powers. The conflict began on 28 February, despite ongoing diplomatic efforts between Iran and the U.S. regarding Iran's nuclear program, marking a second betrayal of negotiations within nine months.

He highlighted the horrific attack on Shajare Tayyeb Elementary School in Minab, where more than 175 students and teachers were killed. This attack is presented not as an isolated event, but as part of a broader pattern of egregious violations of human rights, humanitarian law, and atrocity crimes committed with impunity. Given the technological and military capabilities of the aggressors, the school attack is characterized as deliberate and intentional—a war crime and a crime against humanity—requiring unequivocal condemnation and accountability, according to him. He stressed that such an attack cannot be justified or ignored, and moral responsibility extends beyond legal frameworks.

The speech further noted that Shajare Tayyeb Elementary School is just one example of widespread attacks: over 600 schools have been damaged or destroyed in Iran, and more than 1,000 students and teachers have been killed or injured in the first 27 days of the war. Civilians and civilian infrastructure—including hospitals, ambulances, health workers, rescue teams, refineries, water sources, and residential areas—have been systematically targeted. The speaker warned that the scale and pattern of these attacks, combined with the rhetoric of the aggressors, indicate a clear intent to commit genocide.

Mr Araghchi placed the current aggression in a broader context, linking it to past international indifference to lawlessness and atrocities in Palestine, Lebanon, and elsewhere, warning that silence in the face of injustice invites further violations. The United Nations and the global human rights framework are portrayed as being at stake, and the international community is urged to hold the aggressors accountable.

Finally, he emphasized that Iran has never sought war and is a peaceful nation with a rich civilization. Nonetheless, Iran is determined to defend itself against the brutal aggressors, and this defence will continue as long as necessary. He called for global acknowledgment of these crimes and stressed the moral imperative to protect civilians and uphold human rights.

Concerned Country

H.E. Reza Dehghani, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the UN in Geneva, addressed the Council to present Iran’s position regarding the ongoing conflict with the United States and Israel. He emphasized the urgency of collective wisdom and accurate understanding of the intentions behind the conflict, rejecting any characterization of Iran’s actions as “unprovoked.” According to Dehghani, Iran is a victim of aggression by the U.S. and Israel, and its military responses constitute lawful self-defense aimed at protecting sovereignty, territorial integrity, and its people.

He criticized the call for an urgent Council debate as legally unfounded, politically motivated, and detached from the realities of ongoing aggression against Iran. Dehghani stressed that U.S. military bases in the Persian Gulf, hosted with the knowledge and consent of littoral states, have facilitated attacks on Iran, making them legitimate targets under international law. These host states, by permitting their territories to be used for military operations against Iran, bear partial responsibility for the conflict and cannot claim immunity from the legal consequences of Iran’s defensive measures.

Dehghani firmly denied allegations that Iran intentionally targeted civilian infrastructure, labelling such claims as misrepresentations of the facts and legally baseless. He reiterated that Iran did not initiate the conflict, but is responding to unprovoked attacks, and warned against inverting the roles of aggressor and victim.

In conclusion, he rejected the framing of the Council debate as “urgent” and criticized it as a politically motivated effort by certain Persian Gulf Cooperation Council members to shield the true aggressors—namely the U.S. and Israel—while obscuring the root causes of the conflict.

Interactive dialogue

Fifty-five country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. They expressed deep concern over the human rights and humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing warfare, with civilians displaced, injured, and killed across the Middle East. On the first day of the conflict, more than 170 children were tragically killed when a girls’ school in Minab was struck. Since then, numerous schools, hospitals, infrastructure, and other civilian objects have also been targeted, further endangering all civilians. Delegations emphasized that children are among the most vulnerable victims and must be specially protected during armed conflict. The majority of countries vehemently condemned the deliberate attack on the school, carried out within the context of the unprovoked military campaign by the U.S. and Israel across Iran.

Delegations highlighted the intolerable human rights situation in Iran, particularly regarding women, and called on the Islamic Republic of Iran and all parties to respect the human rights of everyone, to end the war, and to pursue diplomatic solutions to resolve the current regional stalemate. They urged all parties to engage in dialogue, find peaceful solutions, and fully respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

There was deep concern over growing threats to civilian infrastructure, as well as the environmental impacts of attacks on oil facilities, including acid rain and contamination. Delegations noted that the long-term consequences of such attacks will extend beyond the current generation. All states have a fundamental responsibility to protect children, ensure the full enjoyment of human rights, and uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law during armed conflict. Delegations stressed that the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution must be fully respected during hostilities, and emphasized that accountability is essential. The Council must not allow silence or selectivity to embolden impunity.

Eighteen National Human Rights Institutions and non-governmental organizations also took the floor during the urgent debate. They reported that attacks on schools in conflict zones worldwide have increased by 44%, affecting millions of children. Students and teachers, as civilians, and schools, as civilian objects, are protected under international humanitarian law. Attacking them constitutes a war crime and a grave violation of children’s rights.

They strongly condemned any attacks on schools and called for accountability for all perpetrators. They urged states to adopt a comprehensive and impartial approach to all violations, ensuring that the rights of all victims are recognized without discrimination. No one is above the law. Any credible investigation must be independent, centring evidence and testimony from within Iran—by Iranians, and for the victims. Families have a right not only to truth, but also to dignity: to be heard and to be believed.