Despite his valuable contributions in different subjects, among the more important ones the critic to the anti-narcotic policies and the proposal of a law for the demobilization of children linked to the armed conflict, the senator Orduz was not re-elected to the Congress. We are presenting now a synthesis of his statement on the project for the Colombian Coalition.

Unfortunately, the initial project presented by the senator Orduz has suffered several modifications, fact that has made the project lose its initial spirit.
Among the Wayuu, indigenous people of the Guajira region in Colombia, the Pútchipu is the person in charge of solving conflicts and making peace.

After the peace dialogs between the Government and the Guerrilla group FARC were finished, the Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict had pointed out its concern about the serious acts against the human rights of boys and girls which continued happening in the country, such as the Bojayá slaughter and the military operation in popular neighborhoods in Medellín.

In this number, the Pútchipu Bulletin has a look at the legislative initiatives for the prevention and separation of children and young people from the conflict, shows a young woman’s testimony on the military operation “Mariscal” which took place on May in Medellin, and analyses the law project of Youth Criminal Responsibility. Reading this edition make us reflect on the progressive deterioration of the Colombian situation.

Since the last quarter of the past government (May-July), when the “Presidential Guidelines for National strategies against the Terrorism” was created (May 2 /02) it begun the creation of bases for a regressive policy. This one is expressed, among others, in the B part of the Second Strategy, which ordered the Education and Communication Departments to project and develop “educative programs focused on, firstly, the generation of a committal behavior in the civil population, in such a way that each citizen knows how he or she can contribute to the effort of getting information about terrorism groups, their financial sources and the way of communicating those information to the pertinent authorities; and secondly, the promotion of the abandonment of weapons by the members of terrorism and violent groups”. In other words, this strategy was not referring the prevention mechanisms against the recruitment, nor the improvement of the actual procedures for the abandon of weapons, demobilization and social reintegration (for both children and adults), but was summoning the population to “cooperation”.

Also, it contemplated the possibility of calling reservists and enabling the National Defense Department “through the Private Security and Vigilance Superintendence and the Colombian Civil Defense” to give “the required information about the terrorism (...) and the training and organization of the community for fighting against it (...)” and to define “in coordination with the governors and mayors, action plans to supply information and give early alerts to the State Security Organizations”. In other words, these alerts which haven’t worked for preventing slaughters, would now be implemented in a more effective way to attack terrorists.
This Presidential Guidelines, whose most important policy is the direct cooperation and help of the civil population with the National Armed Forces (one of the parts of the conflict), is in practice, what Alvaro Uribe Velez’s administration established as it’s national policy of “democratic security”, in a context of a deeply worsening of the armed conflict.

With the development of legal measures contained in the decrees that determined the declaration of the State of Emergency, or “State of Internal Upheaval”, how it is known in Colombia, the already scarce liberty of the citizens is reduced to the bare minimum and the precarious children’s condition in the most dangerous areas of the armed conflict gets worst and risky.

In particular, there is concern about three kinds of measurements:

- The declaration of special zones for “Rehabilitation and Consolidation” where the control of the public order is in the hands of the military commandants of the State (initially in Arauca, Sucre and Bolivar, but with the possibility of an extension in other regions of the country very soon), who are allowed to capture people with out a legal authorization “in case the circumstances make it impossible to get, and when there were an insurmountable urgency and the necessity of protecting the humans rights of people in serious or imminent danger”, they can also intercept communications, make house breakings and residences inspections (without previous legal authorization too), require save conducts for free mobilization from rural to urban zones and changes of residence. Being the forced recruitment one of the main causes of the displacement of families, the difficulties of mobilization and changes of residence will surely press the young people to join the armed groups, because there wont be any different option for leaving the zones with military disputes and intense fights.

- The creation of an informants net, called “Collaborators”, who for some money given by the state, will give information about the members of insurgent organizations, in a country where the indices of poverty reach the 70% and the official unemployment recognized by the government reaches the 20% of the PEA, presents the question about how many boys, girls, and young people will be forced to declare and, in that way, become military objectives for the opposition armed groups and even the paramilitary groups too, in such circumstances when the testimonies given involves members of the AUC (Colombian self defenses groups).

- The permission for military and police forces to use private properties and services by civilians who are “professionals or technicians, when the official services wont be sufficient or wont exist at all, and there wont be any different alternative for protecting the fundamental rights, or when they would be indispensable for guaranteeing the life and health of the people”. Arguing national security necessities, there already exists in the country public and private schools, community houses, and health centers occupied by the military forces or the police. There are also other circumstances caused by the illegal armed groups that impedes the exercise of the rights of education, health and free movement; this circumstances obstruct the possibilities for hundreds of children and young people of doing normal activities which keep them away from the violence, preserving their physical and emotional health, and allowing them to have a free development of their personality.
On May 21st, since 3 am in the morning the inhabitants of the neighborhoods Las Independencias, El Salado, Nuevos Conquistadores and 20 de Julio in Medellín lived terrible horror moments of a magnitude they had never imagined.

The operation “Mariscal” had the participation of the Fourth Army Brigade troops, and men from CTI, DAS, the Metropolitan Police, the Antioquia Police and the National Police; in the other side there were the armed groups FARC, ELN and CAP (Popular Armed Commands).

At 11 am in the morning, the resistance and tiredness became action. Spontaneously, from the window of one of the houses, a little hand from a girl went out, fluttering a white towel, after a while it became more than a single hand and the number of hands grew more and more. Soon, all the windows, balconies and doors were full of kids and young people with white rags, shouting “No more”, “We want Peace”. Suddenly there were children and people in the streets, fluttering their white rags and walking thorough the confrontation. Two of the leading boys felt injured because of the shots that wasn’t stopping.

That was the only way how the armed forces went back their way, even though the Government council, at noon, had determined to continue the operation all day long.

CAROL marched past May 21st as part of the civil society that was doing a resistance action against the operation “Mariscal” which left the result of 45 people arrested, 39 injured, and 9 people dead (among them three children and one young boy), all of them from the neighborhoods Las Independencias, El Salado and Conquistadores in Medellin. Carol has a 17 months old son, works with a development plan called Realizadores de Sueños (Dreams Producers), is doing pre-university studies and hopes to graduate from accountancy, raise her son by her own and have four more children: two boys and two twin girls.

THE WONDER YEARS...

“I was born in San Carlos twenty years ago and I was interned when I was six. I was there two years and a half... ¡Uff!, I would be there again because I was with kids with my same age and there wasn’t too many people who scold us but there was discipline. I studied kinder and I was passed from first grade to third because I was very intelligent. I didn’t course second grade and I wasn’t cheating. Since I was almost seven years old, I went alone to La Estrella . My mom used to send me alone, in a bus from here, from Medellín, to the boarder school, and there I had to ask somebody to dial my home telephone number in a public telephone and tell my mother I had arrived and I was on my way to the boarding school”.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD 20 DE JULIO...

“When I first arrived to the neighborhood the streets were not properly paved, there was so many people. The neighborhood wasn’t pretty, it was extremely poor. It was the first time I was living in a quite ugly neighborhood. But because they had bought the house it was better to live there. At the beginning, I almost never went out and, because I was new, all the kids were bothering me. They used to send me cards and letters. I was very beautiful. It passed like a year and I still didn’t go out or anything, I had almost no friends. It was from the school to the house and form the house to the school for almost a year. But the next year I met girl friends. I started to be outside all time and the problems in my house started because I had to take care of my four brothers and sisters.

I studied at UNAULA school from the Autónoma University. I never studied in my zone because I liked better to study in other neighborhood, with other people. I didn’t like to study with the people from my same neighborhood because the problems of the neighborhood goes to the school and the problems of the school goes to the neighborhood”.

YOUNG AND MOTHER

“When I got pregnant I couldn’t be happier. I like kids and I couldn’t believe it, it was a very big happiness. First it was the joy and then... What am I going to do? I told my mom more calmed and happy than ever, she didn’t believe and she said like “Is it true?” I said yes, it’s true. I had three months. I knew it on Tuesday and I told her on Thursday. I was joking a lot because I had a huge belly and I said: ah! Yes! I’m missing nine months and a father. So I took the test and I told her before she knew it by other ways.

The mom I imagine is that one who shares everything, everything with her baby. I want to raise mine in the best possible way but I can’t because I’m not by his side. Where I leave him, they educate him in a very different way and he is becoming a little bit rude. Any free time I have I take him with me, I immediately do it. At nights I can’t take care of him because I have to do the laundry. I haven’t had the chance of being with my baby enough time and being the mother I want to be, instead I have to leave him in other place or with my mother because I have to work from 7 to 7, so sometimes I’m very sad because I have so little time for my kid”. 
I would love to keep studying but when you have a baby... Look, if I study I have to stay at home and then I can't reach my goals, for me and for my son, and if I leave the house I can't study. I say that maybe later I will continue studying.

I'm going to raise my child the better way I can and then I'll start to study because I'm still young. This will be hard at the beginning. What I really want is to find a job, get my independence, raise my son, study, be an accountant, have five more children, husband and work to be independent and travel. I like this stuff like the plataforma de mujeres (women platform), I'd like to know more about the violations of rights, I like to manifest myself.

First, I'm gonna buy what I need for getting my economical independence, pay all the expenses. I don't want a boyfriend for the moment. My son is first and I don't have time to be with other person. When I had a boyfriend, I always took time from my son to give it to him, so little time that I had for him, especially at nights and I used one or two for being with my boyfriend.
The Colombian state ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child one decade ago. Nonetheless, the reality is shocking because the conflict is affecting boys, girls, and young people in so many different ways, violating their fundamental rights. It is urgent that the state gives children a priority place and establishes public policies to improve the life quality of all Colombian children and young ones, to prevent their involvement in this war, and to bring properly attention to the directed affected ones. It is also very important the government negotiation to promote humanitarian agreements with the illegal armed groups which implies an immediate break-off to hostilities and kidnappings against the civil population, the abolition of the recruitment of children in their troops and to allow that all the boys and girls currently linked return to the civil life.

In the debate that took place on May 30th of 2001 in the National Congress about the children who are members or who were members of illegal armed groups, there were found several extremely important situations on this field:

- There was evident the enormous difficulty in the prevention of child recruitment by the illegal armed groups due to:
  - The large inequality in the distribution of wealth which implies that 41% of children under 18 live on conditions of poverty, and 15.3% of them live in abject poverty, besides the around three million children who are outside the educational system.
  - The noticeable relationship between the maltreatment of children and their binding in to war. UNICEF says that two million children are maltreated each year in Colombia and 870,000 of them are maltreatment in a sever way. In 38% of Colombian homes kids are being hit. Boys get more physical punishment than girls and it is more common in rural than in urban zones. In 26% of homes children are witnesses of physical violence between members of the family.

- There was found a series of legal blanks. The outcome of this are the lack of unified criteria for the judges about sending young people to The Reinsertion Program or to the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar, ICBF, (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare), the absence of any term for the military or police forces to present them to the ICBF, the inequity in the treatment of captured children or those ones who come from groups without political recognition, and the absence of regulation for the Family Defendant in order to follow the legal process, determining their situation and the benefits that law gives to children that belonged to armed groups in the past.

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1 Carol de Roy, Director of UNICEF in her article “Childhood: the prior peace community for Colombia” affirms that these statistics “…put Colombia as the third more unequal Latin American country”.
2 In its book “Letters for the New Governments”.
3 Constanza Ardila Galvis in her book “The crop of Anger” maintain that “the psychological and cultural model, with its rear guides, observed in the population under displacement situation gives us reasons to say this is the model that has generated sons of war, these violent beings that belong to one or another band. With this we don’t want to deny the economical and political factors, but to stand out that in addition to them there are social factors (interacted power relations) and psychological ones making a way to react to certain stimulations…” Therefore the thesis this book poses is that the origin of violence in Colombia is not within the war itself, but that the war lives because its protagonists, in one way or another, are trained to nourish it. The violent culture is transmitted to one generation to the next one, raising the kids to project it inwards: the son impulsively repeats his father’s history, and when he is an adult, he has the potential not only to transmit it to his descendants but also to unleash his vengeance into the war where the important goal is not the enemy but the chance of taking revenge for what he has been through since childhood.
There were detected limitations in the field of security that refers basically to the incapability of the state to bring security to children who have chosen to leave the armed groups and to their families, and the absence of any psychological treatment that could allow them to overcome the state of terror and anxiety in which they remain after leaving the armed groups.

There were also found limitations and deficiencies in the attention service of the Reinsertion Direction, dependency of the Ministry of Interior due to the scarce cooperation between different institutions that works towards the defense and protection of the children, to the lack of knowledge of the protective labor that the ICBF leads, and the lack of control programs ruled by control organizations such as the General Attorney’s Office and the Ombudsman’s Office.

Recognizing the advances on the attention given by the ICBF to the youth that have left armed groups, treating them as children in an special situation and not as law breakers, it has been evident that there are still some things to improve. In the reinsertion process there have been forgotten very important actions like reconstructing the child’s affective bonds, allowing the children to participate and take decisions about their own lives, finding financial aid for working with the families and getting enough family defenders to protect all the affected ones. It is also a problem the centralization of the program because it makes the children be far away from their environment, their culture and in some cases their own families.

**Bill N°180/01**

*An initiative for the future*

The bill presented with the collaboration of the Ombudsman’s Office, the ICBF and the Colombian Jurist Commission as an answer for the evident judicial blanks presented in the debate and to the national and international recommendations on the subject. It proposes an integral legislation for the protection and attention of children or adolescents who had been recruited or forced to participate in the internal armed conflict. The intention of starting its diffusion, receiving the constructive contributions and getting the biggest possible support, opened the doors to the debate for its approval in the First Commission of the Senate in March of 2002 with the exposition of the Senator Jesus Piñacué.

This bill was created in order to obey the mandate (which deserved its postulation to the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999) given by 2.700.000 children who in 1996 voted for the respect of life, peace, love and family rights.

The United Nations High Commissioner for the Human Rights recommended in its report of 1999 to harmonize the internal norms with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as the Child Rights Committee had pointed out in their 1994 report. In the report of the year 2000, this request is reiterated: “The office have observed the worryingly increase of the violence against minors. They have been victims of attacks in the framework of the armed conflict, they had been murdered, kidnapped (most of times by guerrilla groups), and displaced. Also, children have been affected by family maltreatment and sexual abuse… The high Commissioner regrets that there haven’t been yet applied the programs for integral attention to children who participated in the conflict. It wasn’t either done the harmonization of the internal legislation with Convention on the Rights of the Child…” (Heavy type added later).

**CONTENTS OF THE PROJECT**

It’s determined that every child and adolescent under 18 who has been recruited or forced to participate in hostilities or armed actions caused by the internal armed conflict has the quality of victim. This rule is a pillar and foundation for the rest of the project because it points out the responsibility of the state to guarantee the victims attention and integral protection.
Some of its rules tend to fulfill the blanks in the current Minors Code, that in spite of the 9 irregular situations that involve children and require the state, society or family intervention for protecting them, the code does not contemplate the situation of minors that are or were linked to the armed conflict, even tough at the time of its expedition the armed conflict had been taking place for more than one quarter of a century. Because of this it has to be modified.

The chapter of competence includes which are the entities and authorities which must look after the integral protection and attention of boys, girls and adolescents who had left the illegal armed groups. The responsibility of designing and implementing a special program for these children is at the ICBF hands, which is the chief organ of the Sistema Nacional de Bienestar Familiar, SNBF (National system of Family welfare) which is the one in charge of the minor’s protection. The ICBF has other functions like to rule the family defenders, who have big responsibilities like giving protection to families and children.

The chapter of procedure is about the practice, the process acts and the provisions of the defense of their rights from the very first moment when children abandon the armed groups or are captured. It is also included which authorities will be in charge. The transparency and clearness of each step of the process is essential, because in the past the legislative vacuums have caused different treatments for the children that had left the illegal armed groups, violating the principle of equality.

This chapter emphasizes in the component of mental health, trusting that only getting the psychological and emotional recovery of the child, it is possible to end the circle of violence that weights down in the country. Because of that, it will be necessary to practice a mental health exam to all children for establishing how hard are they affected and their psychological and emotional state. This exam is considered of great importance because it can determine the correct treatment for every child (it has to be special and particular for each case, and its duration can change). It is impossible to think there are equal times of treatments for all of them because they haven’t been affected in the same way. The important thing is, then, that every child can leave the specialized center totally recovered, as mentally, physically and emotionally, because it is the only way to guarantee that they will never rejoin war.
According to the project, the only measure, proper for children who have left the illegal armed groups, is the protective one that the family defender could dictate, because some judges are sending this kids to reeducation institutes where they are treated as young law breakers, and it is very harmful because the problematic is different and special for every one of them.

The boys, girls and adolescents who had left the illegal armed groups will have the right of juridical and socio-economical benefits, once their age and retirement from these groups have been proved. These benefits are nowadays given to adults and children who, willingly, give themselves up in order to rejoin society and who belonged to an armed groups with political recognition from the National Government, fact that is violating the right of equality, established in article 13 of the National constitution because it excludes the children that were linked to the autodefensas (paramilitaries groups). The bill deals with benefits for every child with out distinction between groups nor their form of coming out of them.

If these children are treated as delinquents and they don’t get productive choices, it is very feasible that they return to war. The option of sending them to jail or reeducation institutes does not solve the problem at all. That is why it is very important to emphasize in a treatment that allows them to find a real way to rejoin society. The possibility of socio-economical benefits is noticeable; it has to given by the Reinsertion Direction established in the project, because it is the way for giving to these children a real opportunity to find a kind of way for supporting themselves. Until the debate date, this benefit has not been given to any of these children. Because of all these facts, an Interinstituional Technical Committee of Policies for Children and Adolescents who had left the illegal armed groups is created in order to establish the national policies in this matter.

The chapter of prevention establishes rules of great importance: article 162 of penal code is an important background because it typifies the minors’ recruitment and punishes it with a highest prison penalty than the one established in law 418 from 1997; nevertheless this is not enough and that is why the article 31 of the project creates, also, a new article in the Penal Code that increases by a third part the penalties imposed to adults when they use children to commit serious offences and crimes. The purpose of this law is to dissuade the use of children to commit crimes such as genocide, forced disappearance, kidnapping, torture, forced displacement and terrorism, as well as the crimes related to people and goods protected by the International Humanitarian Law. In all these cases the penalty will increase for those ones who use children as an object to commit the crimes.

The Education Ministry has the duty of making a curriculum for an obligatory class of human and children rights, where the students get information and advice about the causes and consequences of their involvement with any illegal armed group.

This project refers prevention actions including the creation of an Early Alert System, and Educational Processes in pedagogy for the peace and peaceful solution of conflicts. It is stated that the National Government must assign resources for the protection and prevention programs, and integral attention of children and adolescents who are part of the project. The rules which promote the international cooperation for technical and financial support in the making and fulfillment of programs and projects related to the issue are also included.

That would change with the breaking-off of conversations with the guerrilla groups and the possible dialogue with the paramilitaries (self defense groups).
The Coalition have expressed its concern about the bill presented to the National Congress about “Juvenile Criminal Responsibility”, because we don’t share the conception that gives basis to the juvenile criminal responsibility expressed on this law. The main argument is that it is contradictory that Colombia assumes that children and young people are incapable of exercising their political rights as citizens and human beings but they are considered able to be criminally responsible for their acts.

The Coalition as a whole does not have an homogenous position about the system of Juvenile Criminal Responsibility, but some of the organizations had proposed modifications in order to get this bill to be less harmful to Colombian boys, girls, and adolescents considering that if this proposals are not approved this project would be one of the most regressive criminal legislations and will go against children’s rights.

Colombian State has not improved its policies to guarantee the fulfillment of fundamental children rights (even though these are prevalent according to the Constitution), nor its polices for elucidating the structural causes that lead children to break the law. That is why it is not acceptable that in a country where criminality is so high the only measure adopted by the state would be punishment of boys, girls and young ones, including those who have abandoned the armed conflict.
The Coalition reaffirms the urgency of developing clear, coherent and immediate public policies to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents according to the rules established at international legislations, specially at the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol.

In Colombia, according to the census of 1993 the total population was 36 million people (the actual projections are estimated to be 44 millions), on which 16,722,708 were children and young people, that means a 43%, the 39.9% of this population under 18 lives in poverty and among then 1,500,000 (from which 591,500 are girls) live in abject poverty.

Based on a conception of Law applicable to children and youth, which considers that the crime has causes that do not depend exclusively on the person but on the social and economical circumstances of poverty and exclusion from the joy of social, cultural and economical rights, it can be analyzed that the fact of punishing a young lawbreaker does not resolve the delinquency problem at all. Only the treatment of the economical and social causes of crimes can dissuade their appearance and the use of the punitive law.

In addition, if the state defines a legal treatment that starts recognizing that children and adolescents have rights, we can get to the point where the subject of juvenile criminal responsibility is based in a justice that respects rights and the proper process, and which applies the United Nations rules about the administration of juvenile justice and the UN rules for the protection of the imprisoned minors.

“A criminal system for youth and, in general, any system which intends to give attention to the problem of children and young people in conflict with the law (including those ones who were part of the armed conflict) should attend a social policy that emphasizes on the prevention and on the minimal use of the Judicial System”

Archivo Coalición.

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1 These organizations are: DNI, Save the Children UK, Colectivo por la objección de Conciencia, Justapaz, Taller de Vida and Fundación dos mundos.
The project—which begun last government and which is undecided nowadays—starts making a list of rights based on national and international laws, to harmonize the Colombian legislation focusing on the recognition of children and youth’s rights. This is a laudable intention product of a long process and several discussions between national institutions that have been repeatedly rebuked by institutions as the Child Right’s Committee.

Non the less, since the second chapter, the project points out a whole of measurements which make equal the children’s infringements of the criminal law (children between 12 and 18) to the adults ones, contradicting the article 19 of the United Nations Rules about the administration of juvenile justice (Beijing rules), which establishes that the children imprisoning into penitentiaries will be use as the last possible resource and for the shortest possible time.

In addition, until now, the Colombian legislation had ruled that people under 18 can be recognized as participants or perpetrators of some infringement but they don’t have criminal responsibility for the committed crimes. That is why the treatment they should have is more re-educational than punitive. But after this bill, and according to the level of the crime (Chapter III, The Punishable Conducts), children can assume criminal responsibilities, with sentences from 3 to 5 years, contradicting elemental principles of the international law.

It is true that the sanction and proceedings measurements insists on a pedagogic component, but the classification of them (slight, intermediate, serious and specially serious) is showing that they are talking about criminal sanctions properly said. Considering that there is already a tendency to generalize the stereotype the youth as delinquents, if this law is approved it would be an additional factor to judge poverty and youth.

Another point is that, in spite of the recognition of the fact that children and youth is being used by the illegal armed groups, this crime and its causes has not been prevented with a public policy for childhood and youth.

In a country where the determination of politic crimes is each time less used (because it is considered that the combatants and the opponents actions do not have a politic sense but are considered as common delinquency or terrorism—which is also a common crime) the norm proposed by the government (article 30) points out that the boys, girls, and adolescents who break the law established in the chapter of State Security (political crimes) will be beneficiaries of programs focused on reinstatement and demobilization as ex-combatants.

However, this project does not establish a special criteria to define which acts committed by boys and girls will be considered as political crimes and which ones can be considered common crimes.
It is clear that there already exist problems and difficulties in the de-
mobilization and reinstatement programs, but in case of the approbation of this law, there would be bigger problems and congestion in both attention centers for the children and young people who have left the armed conflict and for the detention centers for youth too. This, of course, would happen without solving the juridical blanks, the lack of financial aid and the lack of cooperation between the private institutions and the national ones in charge of the services on these fields.

An organizations group including by the Ombudsman’s Office, and the Colombian Jurists Commission concluded that there are, at least, three modifications to the actual bill that have to be done:

1. People under 15 won’t be, in any case, punished by the system of juvenile criminal responsibility. To oppose a penal judicial process for children between 12 and 15, is a sensible idea because these are the most critical ages at the beginning of the adolescence and, from a psycho-social point of view, a judicial process and punishment can ruin their entire lives. Special reinstatement, prevention and attention programs must be developed for these children. Because of these, the articles 15, 16, 21, 35, 64 and 66 must be modified and the article 20 must be eliminated.

2. People over 15 will only be deprived from their freedom as a last resource, and if it is possible the reclusion must be at their own family residences. According to the international parameters of the matter, the imprisonment for young people over 15 must happen only in exceptional circumstances, it can be ordered just for special and very serious crimes and, if it is possible, it has to be in the family residence in order to avoid familiar separation (statement established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child). In this sense, article 21 must be modified and article 89 must be abolished.

3. The boys and girls who have left the armed conflict, won’t be, in any case, punished by the system of youthful penal responsibility. Our position is that this subject must have a special and different treatment and it must be part of a integral prevention policy to act and rule according to the International Human Rights, the Children’s Rights and the International Humanitarian Law.

Finally, it is necessary to insist on the idea that the children and young people who are or were part of the armed conflict must be considered “victims”, not to disqualify them or deny their dignity, but to point that their basic rights are being violated, and that both the state and the illegal armed groups have the responsibility for this. The bind of children in to the armed conflict has generated a very negative hard impact on both civil and recruited children and young population.
PRESS RELEASE

The Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict in Colombia rejects the facts registered past May against boys, girls and adolescents in the regions of Chocó and Antioquia, mainly.

In addition to the terrible facts, largely known by the public opinion, that happened past May 2nd in the towns of Bojayá and Vigia del Fuerte in which more than 100 people died (45 children and young people among them), and which caused a massive displacement of more than 8000 indigenous and afro-american people due to the armed confrontation, there are going on other violent actions in this zone of the country, which include bombardments that impede any perspective of a prompt return of the communities that had been occupying this territories since long time ago.

In the same way, since the last week of May, the mass media announced the presence of the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC, in low class neighborhoods of Medellín, who had the purpose of eradicating the guerilla’s urban militias and youth gangs that have been operating since several years in urban places called “comunas” in the Northeastern and Northwester zones of the Antioquia capital city.

In this “comuna?” the permanent disputes between the armed groups had produced the death of children and adolescents, as result of the “lost bullets”. Neither the local nor the national authorities have developed any prevention action for this attacks to the childhood. They haven’t either designed any policy of demobilization, disarm and reinstatement of youth gangs and groups to the civil life.

This situation is becoming notoriously worst since last Tuesday May 21st, when at 3 am begun the “Mariscal” operation in the neighborhoods of Las independencias, El Salado, Nuevos Conquistadores and 20 de Julio from the thirteen “comuna” in Medellín. Several bursts of machine-guns were shot from a Black Hawk helicopter of the National army which, supported by armor- plated tanks, took into the place more than one thousand troops of the IV Army Brigade, the National Police, the Antioquia Police and DAS (the administrative security department) to confront a similar number of men from the urban guerilla of the FARC, the ELN and the Comandos Armados del Pueblo, CAP, (Popular Armed Commands), in an area which, according to local organizations “has more than 34.000 inhabitants, with a 60% of children and young people under 20”.

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Even though the official information announced just 9 dead people, among them two girls and two minors, witnesses had said that “during the ten hours the confrontation lasted, there were also dead soldiers, three kids dead (two young boys from the school Las independencias and a six years old girl from the school El Refugio) and two severely injured girls from the special school 20 de Julio”. Among the 37 injured people, 24 were male between 16 and 20, and 12 were children.

The armed confrontation has continued until now in these kind of neighborhoods in Medellin. Yesterday, May 27th, the Colombian coalition received reports about the death of other girl in the neighborhood Nuevos Conquistadores caused by the crossfire between the fighting forces. Other five civil people have been injured, and a man, apparently a member of one of the bands, was dead according to press versions.

Because of these facts . . .

We demand from de Colombian State, protection to the civil population and immediate attention to the victims and communities in displacement situation of both urban and rural affected zones.

We request to the International Organizations, the creation of a Verification Commission in order to get a properly investigation and identification of the responsibilities that could exist.

We ask to all the armed group, the respect of the integrity and life of boys, girls, and youth who, unfortunately are part, since very early age, of the inhuman world of the war in Colombia.


Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict in Colombia.
Last May 16\textsuperscript{th} took place the ARC workshop (Action for the Rights of the Child) in order to interchange conceptual and methodological elements with different organizations about the prevention of the linking of children in the Colombian armed conflict.

Between June 25\textsuperscript{th} and June 29\textsuperscript{th} the “Global Meeting of Children and Youth as Peace Builders” was held in Villa de Leyva. It had the participation of boys, girls, and young people from different countries, who are also living an armed conflict or that had lived it before, and who are now leading actions for the reconstruction of their society. Several young people who had been part of the prevention workshops developed by the Coalition, participated in this event.

The Coalition welcomes Creciendo Unidos and Save the Children Sweden as new members since June and September respectively.

INTERNATIONAL COALITION ACTIVITIES

Last November the United Nations Security Council signed out the 1379 Resolution in where it was condemned the use of children as soldiers and it was requested to the General Secretary a “list of the parties in the armed conflict which recruit or use children, violating the international applicable obligations”. The Secretariat of the Coalition prepared a list of the parts that should appear in the 1379 list, including Colombian actors, and sent it to the General Secretary.

Between June 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} took place a meeting of the Latin-American National Coalitions, the International Coalition and UNICEF in Paraguay where the Colombian Coalition participated. In this event there was a notorious advance in the development of an joint strategy for the strengthening of the work in favor of common objectives.

It was published the International Coalitions “Child Soldiers Newsletter” Bulletin last September. It contains different articles and information about this theme on a worldwide level, including an international campaign for the ratification and implementation of the Facultative Protocol by the Colombian state. More information at www.child-soldiers.org.