

# The peacemaker Púrchipu

bulletin 7



Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict in Colombia

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## EDITORIAL

2

## YOUTH

A look into the conflict of my city ..... 4

## CENTRAL THEME

Legislation for boys, girls and youth disarming in the anti-terrorist context ..... 6

## BOYS, GIRLS, THEIR RIGHTS AND...

Letter to my professor friends ..... 12

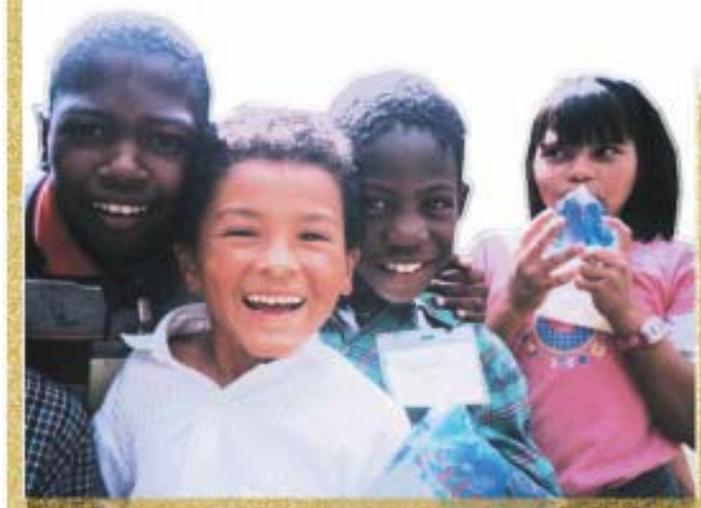
## AGENDA AND SOMETHING ELSE

Children's Drawing Contest, «The boys and girls express their desire for peace in Colombia» ..... 14

# LEGISLATION FOR BOYS, GIRLS AND YOUTH DISARMING IN THE ANTI-TERRORIST CONTEXT

Amalia Eraso J.<sup>1</sup>

María Eugenia Ramírez B.<sup>2</sup>



Every person close to the theme of boys, girls, and youth involved in the armed conflict should have a basic knowledge of the norms proclaimed for child demobilization and re-incorporation to civil activities. In the new government, the latest norms are Law 782 of 2000 and Decree 28 of 2003.

December of 2000 was the three-year term ending of Law 418 of 1997. In 1999, Law 548 extended Law 418 for another three years with one modification—the prohibition of voluntary recruitment for minors under 18 years old into military service (article 13). This initiative emerged from the context of peace dialogues with the insurgency. These dialogues established some judicial benefits for members of guerilla organizations that opt to demobilize themselves. These benefits include political recognition, the possibilities to be included in peace agreements with respect to their human rights and international humanitarian law, and the suspension of orders to capture the spokesperson in the peace dialogue.

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In the framework of the Month of the Child, in the first week of April President Álvaro Uribe Vélez invited children in the lines of the armed groups to demobilize. But many things were left unsaid in his discussion, pronouncing a paradoxical context for the implementation of his politics of “Democratic Security” and the Colombian Government’s support of the United States and Great Britain in the war against Iraq.

Like what has been mentioned in the most recent report of the Permanent Office in Colombia to the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights, the Colombian state has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child referring to the participation of boys, girls, and youth under the age of 18 in the internal armed conflict.

The politics of recruiting at least 150,000 youth as “rural soldiers” was established by a law that created Special Zones of Rehabilitation in the development also of the dominant law of “Public Order.” These laws do not offer guarantees for the more than three hundred children that have demobilized in the last few years, principally from the guerrillas. These children should not be subjected to recruitment by the Armed Forces and the Police, a side from programs that recruit when they turn 18 years old. The regulation of the military situation for demobilized boys and girls is an imperative that the Uribe administration must contemplate. We must avoid the trauma that lives in the people affected by war, and is added to by the anguish of turning to arms, not only as boys or girls, but as adults.

The conditions in which the Colombian armed conflict has developed continue to register high levels of impunity for war crimes, violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, committed by all actors in the armed conflict, including the agents of the state. The daily incidences in which the boys and girls are victims of hostilities, reveal that these are not only involuntary errors or contingencies of military operations development, but deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against the civil population in zones with an intense presence of the armed actors.

Meanwhile the paramilitary group, United Auto-defense of Colombia, maintains that they are currently in the process of demobilizing boys and girls with the participation of state entities and the supervision of organizations of the United Nations. The reality shows that this process, which has not been of public knowledge, presents serious doubts on the objectives and the methodologies that are employed by this government in the 6 months since its introduction. In order to aboard a strategy of prevention and attention to boys, girls, and youth that demobilize from the armed groups, on which when the counterinsurgent offensive, prioritized in the governmental agenda, are not in accordance with the need of significant advances in themes for example, as the statistics on the attention of demobilized boys, girls, and youth, in terms of enjoying the right to education, health (especially reproductive health), recreation and the work, the efficiency of their programs with attention to psychosocial, the desertion of programs of family reunification, among others.

Because of this, in the Month of the Boy and Girl, the Coalition against the use of Boys, Girls, and Youth in the Colombian armed conflict continues its National and International Campaign “**We Boys and Girls do not want to be in the war.**” The campaign reasserts the urgency of the harmonization of national legislation with international norms, protecting the rights of the boys and girls. These mechanisms should ensure civil society participation, especially by the children, in the design, development, and daily monitoring of programs and relative projects on the prevention of recruitment and the utilization, directly and indirectly, of our children in the war.



COLECTIVO POR LA ORIGINACION  
DE CONCIENCIA



Terra de harmonia - Alemania



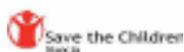
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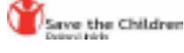
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Defensa de los niños  
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Save the Children



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We, the people of Tierradentro- the Indigenous, African descendents, and farmers- write in accordance with the law and sentiment of our motherland that has existed for millions of years. With pain and suffering our land sees our children being forced into a war. This does not support our desire for a just and dignified society. Inspired by the legitimacy of the law of life, we write and underline the responsibility of every country: to conform to the word of the United Nations and to promote and respect the Human Rights and liberties of everyone, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion.

Due to the presence of the war we endure in Tierradentro, and because we do not wish our existence to remain hidden, we are not able to continue without being spiritual. We have remained submissive thus far. We have not gained from the hints of peace, and even more dangerous is what comes from war.

The State is guilty when our children arm themselves as the only alternative to employment and venting their frustrations of hopelessness. This, in turn, severs their chance for a future inside their communities and to contribute to the development of pacifism and equitativo de las mismas. Our children deserve opportunities to better themselves, to study, to work, to enjoy themselves, to contribute to the community of Tierradentro. It is the State that needs to respond to these constitutional and human rights.

And in this context of confusion, we are worried because they (govern. or armed groups) offer us arms and violence when we are committed to reach peace through dialogue, and construct a dignified, free, and truly democratic country.

In addition to what has been previously stated, we would like to once again confirm our conviction and position of strongly rejecting the various forms of violence. Due to the existence of weapons and absence of legal remedy, marginalization and social exclusion of our people has increased. This has affected our projects and life plans toward peace.

We invite our children to resist the crisis that lives within our country and maintain faith in the possibility to transform our sense of utopia and community.

Because of all this, in the name of life, in the name of justice, in the name of our common visions, all of Tierradentro demands immediate suspension of activities related to forced recruitment of our children—including those that are involved in the state security forces or all other armed groups.

Tierradentro, February, 2003

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ASSOCIATION OF THE  
INDIGENOUS TOWN COUNCIL  
JUAN TAMA AND NASA  
ÇXHAÇXHA  
ASSOCIATION CAMPESINA  
DE INZÁ – TIERRADENTRO

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Copies:  
organizations of the State,  
United Nations,  
National and International



Jhon Elvis Morales, Children's Drawing Contest (Putumayo)





# A look into the conflict of my city

Frequently the problem of violence in Colombia is not seen as a problem that affects us all. We feel it is our fate, inside the city, to be distracted by a reality that we arrive at from partial communication; where the conflict develops questions about weapons and confrontation, between good and bad. Very few times do we have an objective view of the conflict. Almost all studies are presented in a simple and superficial manner. Without a doubt, the major cause of the social and armed conflict in Colombia is the inequality in the Colombian towns that has been overshadowed by silence for a long time.

To continue, we have conducted a brief presentation. As the youth of **Fundación Creciendo Unidos** we see the conflict inside the city and other manifestations of the political conflict social and armed of Colombia:

For us, the principal problem is the manifestation of the existence of groups or *ghettos* that act violently as their only way to demonstrate their power. These groups, known as gangs, are always looking to exercise their domination of their determined zones.

"In our barrios there are constantly brawls and dead; the violence is caused by much of the so called gangs or "parches." They gather in whatever part or place that they defend and call their territory and fight for it. Clearly they don't all use weapons. The better ones strive to be exceptional at graffiti or to be the best break dancer or another type of expression."

The gangs are made up of youth from determined economic situations that see theft as the only form of subsistence. Between them, the sense of ethic and morals are transposed. The manifestation of violence and intolerance are their bread every day on the streets, corners and marginalized neighborhoods where the most intense law definitely reigns.

"Without a doubt, in our neighborhood there are many calm boys, and then there are other 'parches' that are the problem makers that have confrontations over territory or problems among its members"





*"The youth do this because they never had a good education nor good studies. Therefore, there are no work or social opportunities for them."*

This situation is consistently present because of the conditions of inequality and poverty, and because of the passive attitude of the state and of the different governments that combat the accelerated increase of poverty. Because of this, the social problems have increased and there is no response to combat the situation.



*"This happens because there is no work and the government does not give any solutions. Many of these people are ignorant because they were not able to study. Other people do these things to feel more macho."*

All these problems have made many youth die for a little amount of money or because they are not in a [parche]. The appearance of [social cleansing] groups that started to assassinate all the youth of the [parches], introduced another scenario that only enriched the intolerance and the social conflict:

*"They already saw us as a danger to society and one that didn't have the opportunity to study or work."*

At the same time, the children do not see the country submerged in conflict, but as something distant from us. On the contrary, it touches us and we are the most affected.

It is not only the daily conflict between the [parches] in the streets that affects us. Without a doubt we are the most vulnerable to the intolerance of others when we think, speak or feel differently or simply exercise our rights.

*"Furthermore, for the children that are recruited to the different armed groups in Bogotá and that return to a part where there is conflict—this affects us all because one never knows when they are going to interfere with the family or perhaps with themselves. We in the city do not think that the war touches only one. One does not know that there are many militias of the FARC, ELN, and the AUC in our barrio where we live."*

At the same time, the conflict has entered to destroy the dreams and desires of many children. The economic inequality and lack of social possibilities such as studying, access to education, health, recreation, and the shortage of financial welfare and social supply, make it so the children do not find many options besides the conflict. On the contrary, this generates violent relations that only increases the Colombian conflict.





... CONTINUATION OF PAGE 1



In December of 2002, the Congress of the Republic approved Law 782. Law 782 reflects the politics of Uribe Velez's government in its manner of combating the internal conflict with comparative changes from the proceeding government. The political scenarios in this Law have been rationalized by international politics rooting from September 11th and the United States and their allies' war against terrorism. And a national agenda supported by the states methods in the anti-terrorist fight including: the intention to rupture the negotiation processes with the FARC and the ELN during the ultimate phase of the Pastrana government, with the projection of a Communitarian State, and in the interest of democratic security. This legal framework does not sit alone in Law 782 of 2002, but is also supported by the Declaration of the State of Internal Commotion (or the State of Emergency), and in Decree 2002 of 2002 and Decree 128 January, 22nd, 2003, among other norms.

Law 782 and its statutory decree (No. 128 of 2003) obey a logic of war in the name of combating [terrorism]. The consequence of this logic eliminates the possibility for peace dialogues and negotiations to resolve the internal armed conflict. The law specifically negates recognition of political status to the guerilla groups, while extending a legal margin to establish negotiations with paramilitary groups, without the appointment of exploratory commissions. An aggressive diplomatic politic that declares the two largest guerilla organizations as terrorist organizations, while focusing openly on the possibilities of deals with the paramilitaries, profound the conflict while granting the paramilitary impunity from crimes committed against humanity.



Archivo Coalición.

## Situation for the boys and girls within war legislation

Law 418 of 1997 contains some norms in relation to child victims of violence. Some of these norms include:



The establishment of penal sanctions for recruiting children into the insurgent groups or the *autodefensas* confirms an exclusive sentence between 3 and 5 years. Law 418 delineates national judicial order against the [recruitment of minors of age] for the first time. The law, however, while uniquely addressing illegally armed groups, leaves a vacancy against the same conduct realized by the armed forces of the State (article 14).



The establishment of the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) as the priority assistance provider to those children that have remained without family and for children whose family does not have the conditions to take care of them due circumstances of the internal armed conflict.



Establishes that all children participating in the armed conflict have the rights to health, life, and education, among others.



(Article 50) Establishes favorable judicial methods for children whom voluntarily abandon the lines of armed organizations that have been recognized by the State as political actors of armed conflict. (With the previously stated forgetting that the boys and girls are victims of the armed conflict and that, in every case, require special protection, independently of whether the group they are a part of is recognized as being a political actor.) In effect, the law establishes benefits for those children that demobilize from insurgent groups. The children are granted: exemption, cease of procedure, and preclusion to the investigation.

Without a doubt, in order for these children and youth to obtain there stated rights, they have to disassociate from the armed actors voluntarily and the state must recognize their armed organization as a political actor.



In conjunction with Law 548 of 1999, which modified Article 13 of law 418, 1997, prohibits the recruitment of people less than 18 years of age.

Article 2 of Law 548 changed the proceeding disposition, abolished the exception and added a paragraph, whose objective was to harmonize the protection and the guarantee to the right of education with the constitutional requirement to obligatory military service:

**ARTICLE 13.** Minors under 18 years old are not able to join the lines of the military service. Students of 10th grade, who are minors of age, must conform to Law 48 of 1993, which states that those picked to service must wait for their incorporation into the lines until they reach the referred age except when voluntarily and with the express authorization and written permission of their parents, they opt for the immediate fulfillment of their military obligation. In this last case, minors recruited cannot be assigned to zones where operations are developed for war or employed in actions of armed confrontation.

Youth matriculating in a bachelor's program at an institution of higher education have the option to immediately fulfill their obligation of military service or postpone until the moment of termination of their studies. If they opt to

complete immediately, the educational institution must reserve their space in the institution in the same conditions. If they opt to postpone, their corresponding educational title can only be granted to them one time until they have completed the military service that the law orders. The interruption of higher education is able to require the obligation to military service. The civil or military authority that does not accomplish the present disposition will incur on bad conduct that can be sanctioned with destitution.

**Paragraph.** *A youth summoned to the lines that has deferred his/her military service until the termination of their professional studies will complete their required service as a professional university student or professional technician to the armed forces in activities of social, or with civil work for example as a scientist or technician. In every case, the military service will be duration of 6 months and will be equal to one year of rural service with a period of practice and a semester of industrial service; or a year of judicial service, obligatory social service or required similar academics respective to the career like a requisite to graduate. For those embarking in a legal career, military service is able to substitute the thesis and, in every case, replace the obligatory service that is referred to in article 149 of Law 446 of 1998.*



# The “anti-terrorist” politics of President Uribe: Law 782 of 2002

Law 782 extends the validity of Law 418 of 1997, and extends and modifies Law 548 of 1999. This law articulates:

- Obligatory military service (article 13, Law 548/99)

- The prohibition of recruiting minors to insurgent and paramilitary groups. And to not include the use children directly or indirectly in the Public Force.

- Introduces forms in which people can be considered victims of the violence (including terrorist attacks, combats, and kidnappings) and includes every minor that takes part in the hostilities.

- Concedes faculties to the ICBF in order to implement programs of protection and attention for minors that have participated in the hostilities or that have been a victim of the political violence within the framework of the internal armed conflict.

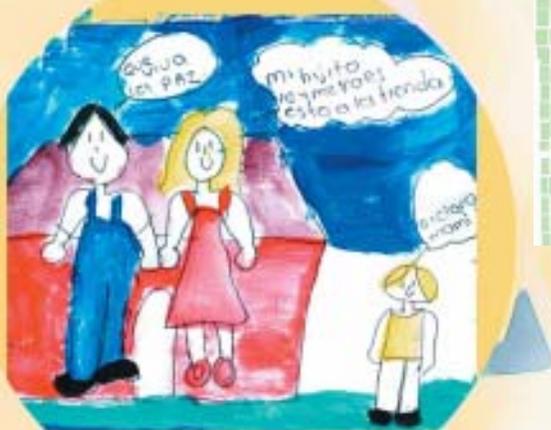
With respect to minors that are discharged, Law 782 establishes that the judicial authorities should send the documentation to the Operative Committee for the Leaving of Weapons (CODA), which will decide about the certification that refers to Decree 1385 of 1994, which signals the following:

**ARTICLE 3.** The children and adolescents in whatever condition discharged from illegal armed actors in the internal armed conflict have to register with the military forces, police authorities, or what ever other authority of the State that certifies the leaving of arms to the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*, within 36 hours following the discharge.

**PARAGRAPH.** The National Program of Reinsertion needs to move forward the legal and judicial steps to arrange the benefits and rights of the children and adolescents that leave the armed conflict.

**ARTICLE 4.** The *Instituto Colombiano of Bienestar Familiar* must protect the rights of children and adolescents established in title 3 of Law 418 of 1997 and the Decree 1385 of 1994.

**ARTICLE 5.** When debated in the Committee what Decree 1385 of 1994 referred to, the concession was that the benefits of the children and adolescents that are actively armed need to make an appointment with the defense of their family, who in every case needs to open the administrative process in their protection.



Decree 128 of 2003 incorporated article 3 of Decree 1385, 1994, on the disarmament of minors from organizations outside the law (this includes paramilitaries), to conform to the valid legal dispositions, affirming much of what is extended and contemplated in the decree that speaks of the armed conflict. The decree determines who enjoys

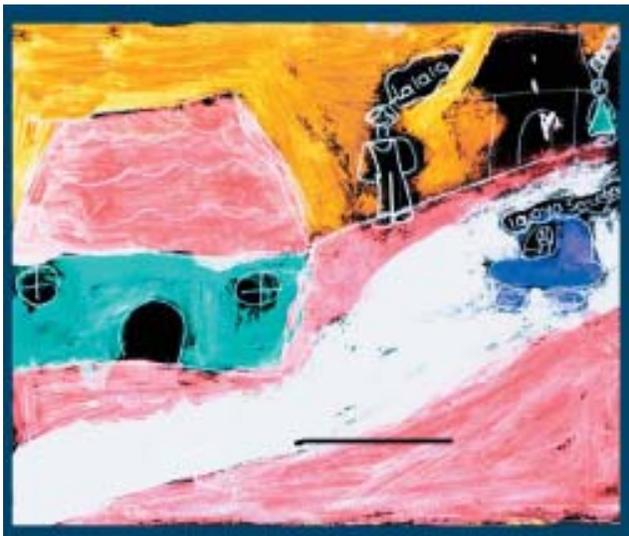
the judicial benefits (pardoned, voluntarily surrendered, demonstrated their will to reincorporate to a civil life, certified) and excludes those that have realized constitutive conducts of atrocious acts of ferocious barbarism, terrorism, kidnapping, genocide, and homicide committed outside of combat or put in the position as victim in the state of defense.

It is necessary to take into account that the inclusion of norms referring to children inside Law 782 of 2002, and their relative decree (Law 128, 2003), is insufficient to attend to the problems of children and youth involved in the armed conflict. It is urgent that the State defines a clear public policy, coherent and immediate to attend to childhood and adolescents in general and to the subject of children and youth that have left the armed conflict; this is in accordance with the established norms in the international legislation, especially in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Protocol on the use of children in the armed conflict, which is already in the ratification process.

An integral public policy would need to start from a major comprehension of the social and economic conditions of exclusion and social marginalization in which live many of the children and youth of our country and concentrate in the implementation of policies, plans, and social programs that guarantee the rights of the children and youth.

Right now, the legislation of valid public order has some positive aspects to broach the subject of children and youth, but also various normative vacancies leave the children that disassociate themselves with the armed conflict in an undefined situation.

An important advance, at least in the letter of the law, is in article 22 of Decree 128 that proscribes "whatever form of utilizing minors in activities of intelligence." Without a doubt, this establishes that the Ministry of Defense will integrate a bonus economy which will collaborate to deliver





information conducive to avoid terrorist acts, kidnappings, or provide information that permits the liberation of kidnappings, to find hidden armament, teams of communication, money produced by narco-trafficking or whatever other illicit activity realized by armed organizations outside the law.

The law establishes, that *“The quality of the member of an armed group outside the law will be proved by the expressed recognition of a spokesperson or a representative of the group, or by the proofs that the solicitor give or through the information that provides the institutions of the state.”* If boys and girls are not to be utilized in activities of intelligence, they should not be required to give information verifying their belonging to an armed group; other mechanisms should be established, besides the acceptance of the same armed group of its pertinence, to prove the situation.

On the other hand, the consideration of children as victims of the armed conflict is a positive; and they are considered such according to article 6 of Law 782 which modified article 15 of Law 418 of 1997 and was extended by Law 548 of 1999.

The consideration of children and youth involved in the armed conflict as victims is necessary but does not to negate their capacity of resilience, devalue them, or declassify them. On the contrary, considering them as victims signals the responsibility of the State and the illegally armed groups, for the negative impact their armed conflict has generated for children and youth.



Johanna Martínez, Children's Drawing Contest (Medellín)

The consideration of children and youth involved in the armed conflict as victims of crimes committed by adults reflects article 8 of the Roman Statute and 162 of the Colombian Penal Code and obeys the consideration of the superior interest of the child. Without a doubt, it is a contradiction in the same law, these children are considered as victims and establishes a penal treatment for them, which punishes the children for the acts that they were forced to commit.

(¿)In effect, the Operative Committee for the Leaving of Weapons (CODA) will keep track of the cases of minors involved in the armed conflict. The CODA is entrusted to send one certified that permits the person involved in the conflict to agree to the judicial benefits consecrated in its favor. Article 19 of Law 782 of 2002, that modified article 50 of Law 418 of 1997 and its rule in article 13 of Decree 128 of 2003, established the judicial benefits of: exception, a conditional suspension of the execution of grief, the ceasing of procedure, the preclusion of the instruction or the inhibitory resolution.

If the children are accepted as victims of the armed conflict, and victims of the illegal illicit recruitment, it is incoherent that they can be submitted to a judicial or administrative process to obtain judicial benefits for the commission of crimes. Not forgetting that the State denied these benefits for some children because they are seen as obligated to commit these acts. The State must investigate and sanction those res-



possible for the utilization of boys and girl in the war and establish actions to prevent their recruitment. The State must also guarantee children not involved in the armed conflict the restitution of their rights instead of criminalizing them and submitting them to a legal processes for the obtaining of judicial benefits.

On the other hand, CODA must adhere to the norms subordinated to the concession of judicial benefits, socio-economics, and the processes of re-incorporation. CODA must *realize the value of the circumstances of voluntary abandonment*.

In accordance with this norm, there is a distinction between children that leave the armed conflict voluntarily and those that are captured, which contrasts international norms and recommendations. It should be taken into account that when children decide to leave the armed group they are then considered *deserters* and are able to be summarily executed. Thus it is clear that the distinction between voluntary and captured children is discriminatory and contrasts the superior interest of the child.

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The responsibility of the State is to promote the reintegration of children that are victims of recruitment and the armed conflict in general, following what is derived from article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. State's role with respect to all of them is to *establish special politics, mechanisms, and institutions for the re-incorporation, reeducation, and preparation to reinsert in social life, those children and adolescents that have participated as members of armed organizations, both State or non-governmental.*

In this sense, a distinction should not be made in the treatment for children based on the circumstances in which they leave the armed group. All children are victims of the armed conflict and the State needs to guarantee them special and integral attention and protection.

## Conclusión

The decisions taken by President Uribe's government to protect the boys, girls, and youth that leave the armed conflict need to take into consideration not only the principals under which offer them defense and protection of their human rights, in which apply to Law 782 and its Decree 128 of 2003, but also the institutions responsible for its implementation, including: the *Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*, the *Defensoria de Familia*, the armed forces and the police, organisms of security of the state, the Committee of Dejection of Arms, among others.

The treatment of the grave problem of using children and youth in the armed conflict is not to be resolved by the method of legal penalization. Conditions and circumstances of child enlistment into the forces is a grave violation of their human rights. The State and society are incapable of offering a healthy and creative environment free from all forms of discrimination and social, political, and economic exclusion, in which in the end, the cause of the war and its progressive deterioration.





## My beloved friends:

You asked for stories that help your children to leave the pain that they are feeling for the death of their friend Mariana. And with the weight that I have taught them to believe in the magic powers of words, today I have to confess to them that this is very difficult. I reviewed the bibliography that I prepared one-year ago for the *Journals on Child Literature in Times of War* and it looks pretty complete, as well as sadly current. I revised all of these pages that numerate the pain of war, but in these wars of the stories, the children are the testimonies: they look at the battles through the window or include, at times, inventing salvaging stories solutions, but they are never the dead. The same happened with the histories that treat the death of their loved ones: In general, they speak about grandparents or pets that have gone slowly because they know that they are old; they arrive at their hour, but that they say goodbye and leave their beautiful memories, as a legacy for the little ones to keep. Without a doubt, I will not find any story for pre-school children that will express what one would feel at four-years old when told that a friend will not return ever again to sit in their blue seat and tell what they did over the weekend.

There do not exist stories in any form like this that seems logical to me. Because until the pain has its logic, and the crudnes also has its own limits. And in this logic, the pain will be in the habit of following the children who's pets, grandpartents, or children die. But to nobody, neither writers

or daring, can tell the history of a girl of four years old that died by being crushed by a bomb. The history of a child that painted her family completely in her school the week before, and saw her friends the friday before, and that was with her parents and brothers, and would soon be in a world that would have a "boom" that would break into pieces.

No. I don't believe in all the universal children's literature exists a story like this. And therefore many times you have heard me say that children have to tell us everything, even the most terrible; that they have the right and the necessity to know, today they weight for me the stories an show me all the inutile words.

So many times we have repeated to our little ones the things that

Leidy Fernandez, Children's Drawing Contest (Bogotá)





# Letter to my profesor friends

Yolanda Reyes

Yolanda Reyes is the director of a nursery school in Bogotá. She has written various books and essays on Youth and Infant Literature—among which, a public work for the collection of The Rights of Children for UNICEF and an editorial entitled “Alfaguara.” The letter that we have published was written for two friends whom are professors of another nursery school. In this school, studied Mariana, who died in the bombing of the club, El Nogal.

we are able to resolve with words and without fights, and we have to ask for forgiveness and understand how to pardon ourselves and give the children a chance to change the world... Without a doubt, one more time, the world where we live has entrusted to tell us the opposite. There has to be a way to invent a world where basic words recaptures this feeling.

We and all the people that work with children have to go and defend them. To those that are closer and also those that are further. To those that are from Arauca, to those from Boyacá, to those in every stoplight, to those that have schools without alternatives, without gangs. We have to be what legendary Argentine mothers of Plaza de Mayo, took with more than 20 years of diapers tied up to their heads, and reclaimed, without falling, their children and little ones. We need to unite and invent a chain of hugs, and actions that grant us that nobody in Colombia will assassinate a child. We need to be ingenious and create a formula

between us all—one that functions—to change the repetitive screenplay of burying and continuing to cry for our children. If all of the adults of this country, are able to think differently, we can reunite around the elemental demand that “Not ever injuring, under any circumstance, one of our children,” perhaps we can visualize some form of escaping these crossroads.

The questions of my adolescent daughter, that rebels against “maturity,” is on my mind. “The mature do not speak impulsively and later go to kill.” She and all the other children and youth look at us worried. They look at us and do not understand. Today my little ones painted stretchers and buildings. Three-year old Monica drew her treatment with the title “the day that killed Monica.” Yes. In a way, she feels that they killed a piece of her... Was it faith? told my child what I told my students and she returned to rebel. “Suppose that these children are able to play wolf, and the mother and father do not speak about these things.”

**PD:** At the point of closing this letter, I have reflected about the voice of a family that fell victim, and you and the other teachers and the parents that help the children to understand, to pardon, to construct; these are the voice of hope. Perhaps, after all, lives hope. The children help us. And yes, like you say, to be with them following and bettering their work; the better the reason; the better the gifts for life. Like this, when they finish what they finish with their little album of memories of Mariana, to never forget her, there already is a trunk full of memories. And we feel the same circle and we see through the same eyes. And we start, as always, to re-invent a world with magic words always. “Erase one time, for it is has been a long time, but many years, in a country very far...”

Perhaps, if we start today, we will reach our children to see this country that we have already seen Perhaps there will be some new story to invent for Colombia. We looked for some magic word to help us begin a new. (Always to begin is the most difficult...After the tangle will unwind).





# Children's Drawings

## "The boys and girls express their desire for peace in Colombia"

The year started with special difficulty for the Colombian children; in the month of February alone, a 13 year-old child died in a control post of the National Army in San Andrés and at least 7 children died and 26 were missing as a consequence of the car bombing at the club El Nogal in Bogotá and in an explosion in a house in Neiva.

However, the children have not lost their happiness and hope...



February 12 2003, was the first anniversary for the Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child relative to the participation of Children in the Armed Conflict. We had a children's drawing contest named "the boys and girls express their desire for peace in Colombia," to give a voice to the children in the framework of the Campaign "the boys and girls do not want to be in the war."

Throughout the entire day, more than 400 children from Putumayo (Mocoa), Cauca (Pueblo Nuevo), with indigenous children and Puerto Tejada with Afro-Colombian children), Medellín, Barranca y Bogotá expressed alongside their artwork, methods against war and their desire for peace.

Children's Drawing Contest - Medellín



Children's Drawing Contest - Puerto Tejada, Cauca



Children's Drawing Contest - Mocoa, Putumayo

# Drawing Contest

# Our desire for peace in Colombia"



In May, we will award the best drawings from each region and have itinerant expositions of all the pieces of work. For the time being, this small demonstration is left as a gift by the participants.

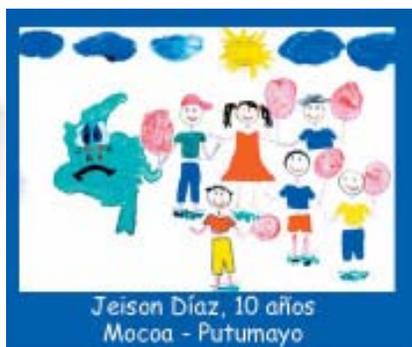
We invite you to visit the virtual exposition of more than 100 pieces of artwork on our web page.



Children's Drawing Contest  
Resguardo Indígena de  
Pueblo Nuevo, Cauca



Children's Drawing Contest - Bogotá D. C.



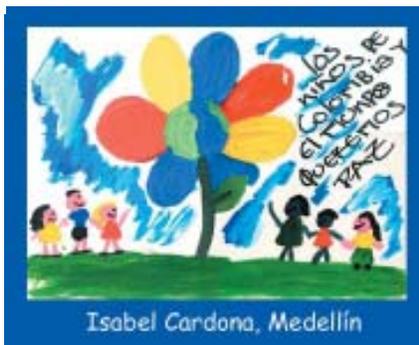
Jeison Díaz, 10 años  
Mocoa - Putumayo



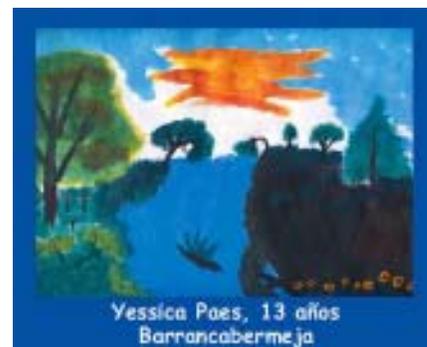
Yeison Moreno, Ciudad Bolívar  
Bogotá



Juan Chocué, Resguardo Indígena  
de Pueblo Nuevo-Cauca



Isabel Cardona, Medellín



Yessica Paes, 13 años  
Barrancabermeja





# COLOMBIAN COALITION ACTIVITIES

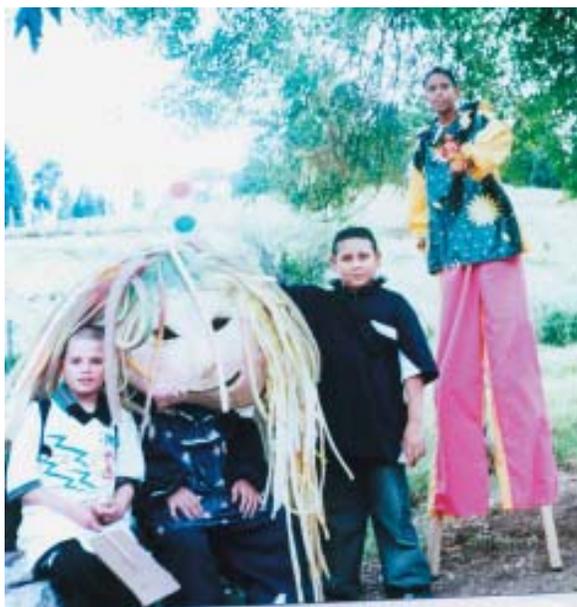
## MEDELLIN

In the month of February, the Colombian Coalition drew up an action plan for 2003, which looks to have a greater regional presence and to strengthen their work on a national and international level.

The Campaign "Us boys and girls do not want to be in the war" continued to progress with important national and international help. Among others, the Peruvian Section of Amnesty International—which during many years has coordinated the Peruvian Coalition against the utilization of child soldiers—, supported a meeting on this theme with the Colombian Ambassador in Lima and realized an important raising awareness work, which translated into the aid of the Campaign by more than 500 people.

The Medellín Coalition was entrusted the drawing contest for its city. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, with the equipment of the high school CEDEPRO and with the encouragement of Altavista in the city of Medellín, 90 children from different popular sectors of the city said "We do not want to be part of the war." They did this in the framework of **CAMPAIGN COLOMBIA** with paintbrushes, paint and cardboard, and with the company of a circus troop and typical musical instruments. The boys and girls expressed with animals, mountains, clouds and sun, their desires to support the construction of a country that they imagine and dream of.

The Medellín Coalition continues its process of strengthening through workshops of internal capacity building and the presentation of a Coalition space for the boys, girls, and youth as a strategy to promote their participation with the Coalition.



Archivo Coalición.

Casey Kelso, coordinator of the Coalition and international secretariat, sent a letter to President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, outlining the preoccupations of the International Coalition of government proposals that could make a more difficult situation for boys, girls, and Colombian children. It also signaled the urgent necessity to offer protection to boys, girls, and youth in the armed conflict.

In January, the representatives of the European Coalitions met to design a regional strategy together. The Coalitions formulated an outline of incidence so that the European Parliament could realize verification missions in the countries where children are still recruited.

Between April 22 and April 25, a meeting of the National Coalitions of Latin America looked to strengthen their strategy together in pursuit of common objectives.

# INTERNATIONAL COALITION ACTIVITIES