

The peacemaker Púrchipu

bulletin 9



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

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HAI DY DUQUE CUESTA, TALLER DE VIDA

The seriousness of the war in Colombia makes of high-priority and urgent to think on prevention, that aims to generate protector factors that avoid the involving of children, young men and women into the armed conflict.

The experience of the work of Taller de Vida in the last three years makes special emphasis on the strengthening the prevention, carrying out processes with youngsters between 14 and 20 years old, in urban marginal zones such as Altos de Cazucá in Soacha and Usme in Bogotá, and in Cauca with indigenous and afro Colombian populations, in the frame of the Coalition's process in the department .

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“There is a way of contributing to the protection of humanity and is not to resign, don't look with indifference how the richness of childhood disappears from our sight.”



TELÉFONO
(57-1) 544 7522

E-MAIL
coalico@elsitio.net.co

BOGOTÁ D.C.
COLOMBIA



COMITÉ POR LA OBLIGACION
DE CONCORDIA



Terra dos homens - Alemanha



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GRAFIC DESIGN

Rocio Paola Neme
roshypaola@hotmail.com

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The Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and Youth to the armed Conflict in Colombia observed with complacency, that finally after a successful campaign done thru 2003, the Colombian congress, giving fulfillment to the recommendations of the Children's Rights Committee (CRC/C15/Add. 137, par. 59) dispatched the law that approves the Optional Protocol of the Convention of the Rights of the Child relative to the participation of children in armed conflicts (A/RES/54/263 25th May, 2000), at present studied by the Constitutional Court.

There are many implications of the coming into effect in the country of to juridical instrument such as the Optional Protocol:

On one hand, it makes possible for children and youngsters with the support of non governmental organization and specialized protection institutions, to turn to the national authorities for the claim of their rights in the context of the armed conflict, in particular to make bigger efforts in relation to a national public politic that attends the needs of demobilized children both from guerrilla and paramilitary groups.

In the presence of the approval of this instrument, many questions are maintained about the coherence of the politics of the Uribe administration towards the childhood and the youth. For example the caution established by Colombia to the Rome Statute that impedes the penal punishment to those responsible of the crime of recruiting and using children on the lines of state Armed Forces, the guerrilla and paramilitary groups and recent propositions of legislative reform that the government pretends to introduce to diminish the age of criminal responsibility, contradict the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

On the other hand the current process of demobilization of to fraction of paramilitary groups responsible of multiple violations of the human rights and of crimes of Humanity is also a factor of deep preoccupation for the risks of impunity that seem to reveal and because the public opinion ignores the orientation that is being employed with children and youngsters who have leaved those groups.

In the presence of this and with the Protocol as a new juridical tool, the door is opened to carry on, with more strength, activities of follow up, monitoring and analysis of the problems that still today affect children and youngsters that in direct or indirect way are immersed on different manifestations of the war.

The Protocol states that, Colombia as a State Party, must submit a report in two years about the accomplishment of this Protocol. This means that the organizations of the civil society and children and youngsters themselves must contribute with reliable, veridical and opportune information to the Child Right's Committee, with the goal of introducing changes in the serious situation of Colombian childhood by the armed conflict. To accomplish this goal, better efforts should be done to divulge the instruments of human rights that protect children.

In the same way, it is urgent to develop an evaluation from children participating on official programs themselves, as well as an evaluation of the programs of the organizations of civil society towards the efficiency, objectives, and strategies, mechanisms of implementation and impact of such programs in relation with the recommendations of multilateral and international instances of Human Rights.

The Coalition will keep on working for it such as last year, both inside and outside the country, to consolidate its perspective and contribute to make a difference in the situation of childhood and youth in the middle of the conflict. In that way the support of different international organizations both intergovernmental and non governmental, and specially of the International Coalition, encourage the invigoration of independent spaces that remember that until every spas in society assume the best interest of the child as of high-priority, every legal effort will remain empty.

Prevention of Recruitment:

Olga Ortega, Juvenile Group Putumayo



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Young Women dream

about their

future



This report was presented in the Departmental Women Encounter "Gumecinda Mojomboy" in the women training activities developed in Putumayo by American Friends Services Committee/ Comité Andino de Servicios and it is the result of combined work by the young women participating on the formation process during 2003.

We all know that youth is a stage of the life that we reach thru a process of development and formation. During a process of training with the Comité Andino de Servicios we had a chance to turn back towards the first stage of our lives: childhood; we remembered the happiest and the saddest experiences; we defined from our own experiences what it is to be a girl. It was an exercise of happy and sad experiences, but very healthy for all of us, because for a moment we were girls again, and valued the importance of that moment in live.

It is big, although forgotten, the importance of this stage of childhood. That is why it has been necessary a Convention on the Rights of the Child. We had the chance of analyzing some of them and see how, in practice, they are violated and therefore, we commit to their recognition and defense.

Youth: time to dream, to project, to prepare ourselves for the future. A young person is unsatisfied and impatient. Does not admit impositions but reasons. Is easily misunderstood by an authoritarian and dogmatic society who rejects and suspects from criticism and is allergic to the new things.

A danger of young women is that they become rebels without a cause and that for the desire of living it all, rush to much the cup of live, assuming responsibilities for which they are not sufficiently prepared.

The vitality of the youngster make him or her think that he/she can do everything and feel in capacity to do it, this may lead him/her to waste his/her live, with negative consequences for the future. Youth is a thing of willingness; it implies a quality of imagination, strength of emotions and the freshness of the deep fountains of live.

The personal shield of our experience is composed by who we are, what internally belong to us, what only we can feel: our body, our feelings, our emotions, our frustrations, our aspirations, our qualities, our flaws and our experiences. No one can suffer in my place. My task is to get to know and value myself, changing my life in those possible and convenient ways.

Here FREEDOM plays an important role. In the fable of "The wolf and the dog" written by La Fontaine, it is possible to understand the real sense of freedom, that doesn't mean to enjoy material goods, that are ephemeral or doing what whim suggest to us every instant.



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Freedom is a lifetime conquer. The formation received in the family may help us in a positive or negative way in the development of freedom. With their best will, fathers and mothers teach their sons and daughters the “blind obedience”, meaning they impose their own criteria, ignoring the son’s capacity of choosing and deciding by himself. This does not contribute to the shaping of free, responsible and autonomous persons.

We see the consequence of this wrong education in so many disoriented youngsters that look for, like the dog in the fable, the easiest way, even though it is the wrong one.

It is true that the exercise of freedom has many obstacles. Some of them inside ourselves: fear, ignorance, conformism, insecurity. Some others coming from outside such as pressure from the groups, intimidations, seduction of consumption society and over all, the lack of opportunities for the youngster to accomplish his/her goals as a person.

The economic situation that we are living thru and the social conditions of our environment close the doors that it drives to free decision to the youngster and push him, with frequency, to join armed groups, to prostitution or to drogadiction, as the only option to move on and satisfy his aspirations of power and his wish to stand out.

The formation at home plays a transcendental role on the structuring of persons capable of conducting their own lives towards their own horizon. The alternatives to avoid youngsters entailing the armed conflict are:



FROM HOME

- Creating an environment of trust and comprehension.
- Giving importance to the searches that young man and women outline and if possible, supporting them.
- Respecting the decisions that they take in their development process.

FROM SOCIETY



- Offering youngsters opportunities for education and recreation.
- Opening working spaces that permit the youngsters develop their potentialities and helping in a responsible way them to grow.
- Believing on the value of youth, not only as hope for the future, but as strength in the present and motor in our society.

In all of this we commit, even though not every thing depends on us. Let this be a chance to invite institutions to open their doors and offer us the support that as young women, we need.





We have worked on the construction of the category “person in situation of displacement”, from the devises that “being displaced” doesn’t make the essence of the person, but is an obliged and temporary condition that must be transcended. This substitutes the term “displaced” and supposes that this persons assume the challenge to constitute themselves in actors and actresses, with the social protagonism on the reconstruction of their live-project, in spite of the deep pain caused by the lost of their roots and territory.

Also, we begin from the comprehension that there is not only one way but many ways of being young, marked by sociopolitical, ethnic, geographical, cultural and economical given differences. This opened look carries with it the search of different ways of interaction with young people. In prevention processes, that gaze implies a global glance over the context where our youngsters live, feel and act.

Another significant principle has to do with the generation of spaces and actions that make possible for youngsters to express their feelings in different ways. Here the art arises as an alternative of communication, participation and over all, a therapeutic strategy.

Our work is based on the perception that youngsters themselves have over their needs, problems, priorities and resources, validating their knowledge and cho-



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re, locating the person in its divers contexts of relations (family, community, and on the widest sociopolitical environment), assuming that the psychosocial needs can’t be isolated from material, social, cultural,

A LOOK TO A PSHYCOSOCIAL PROFILE OF THE TEENAGERS IN THE FRAME OF THE ARMED CONFLICT

The rough day-to-dayness obliges many Colombian youngsters to socialize on non-conventional sceneries such as corners, streets, “parches”¹, gangs, housings, ICBF’s substitute homes², or armed group’s camps. Sceneries that are very distant from those used normally in peace context as schools, sport clubs and in some cases labor space.

This puts them at risk of being stigmatized and in this way the insertion and integration into the diverse and complex social, economical, cultural and educative nets is denied for them. Getting a job that satisfies their survivor needs will be difficult for them and even worst, they will be in risk of not being able to reach the spaces on which they can acquire the abilities considered necessary in a determined historical context to enjoy the condition of “citizens”. This margining and exclusion is manifested in: the index of non-scholar youngsters entailed to delinquency and armed groups, the high rate of youth dissocupation, and the alarming number of violent deaths between youngsters.

¹ Name of groups of even between marginal youngsters.

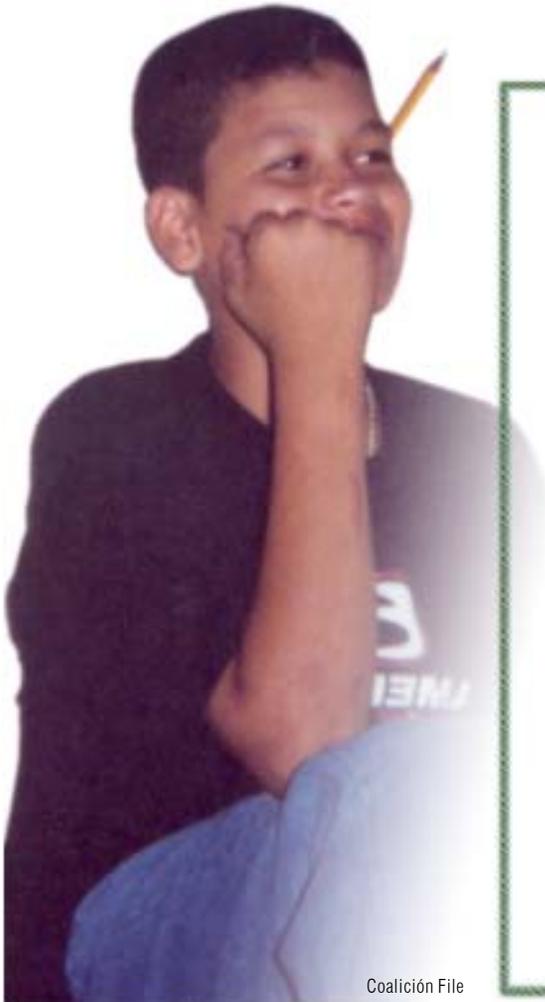
² Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF)



THE CHALLENGE OF PREVENTION

For Taller de Vida, the prevention of children and youngster's involvement to the conflict has been of recent approach. Nevertheless, in the last three years, this topic has become an institutional priority. Taller de Vida participates in the "Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict in Colombia".

We begin from the conception that every action directed to avoid the recruitment and the use of children and young men and women in armed groups must be based on a solid analysis of the situation of childhood and the specific context in which recruitment is having place. That is why having in mind that the causes of recruitment are intrinsically bonded to the political and economical situation, to the dynamic of the conflict, to the specific characteristics of armed groups and to family social and cultural context of each child, talking about prevention supposes to understand the problematic in their different evolutionary stadiums and to foresee adequate strategies to contexts, sceneries and realities with their diverse cultural, ethnical, social and political particularities.



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- ★ To prevent is to create proper personal and social conditions to face the unavoidable problems in live and to create and construct anticipated solutions to avoidable problems.
- ★ To prevent is to act over interrelations and nexus between socially significant problems and implies a group of systematic and articulated actions that tend to promote the development of aptitudes, attitudes and concerns on the persons.
- ★ To prevent requires an interdisciplinary practice and an interinstitutional coordination. It can't limit itself to a partial look or to a projected action over the unique or isolated ambits.
- ★ To prevent is above all helping the group capacity and the community to grow better in order to mobilize solidarity nets, to design and construct their future in a combined way, fortifying citizen values, cultural identity and resources for conflict management.

The situation of social vulnerability of the community is directly linked to its capacity or incapacity to respond to the challenges in the environment and to find in itself tools to face the crisis situations. In this sense, we have verified how each of this community responds in a different way to this challenge, according to the communitarian tools available.

From this perspective, it doesn't exist a universal prevention strategy. On the contrary, each prevention strategy must adequate to different realities characterized by cultures, traditions, and particular organizative modalities. In this sense, prevention must go accompanied by adequate diagnostics to each context.



It is fundamental to stop and analyze the circumstance that foreshadow a mayor or minor risk of recruitment and that characterize the Usme, Altos de Cazucá and Cauca's contexts. With this panorama in mind, prevention must direct itself to the generation and invigoration of protection factors at a personal level (family, school, communitarian, institutional, and social net's environments), in order to modify those aspects that increase the vulnerability condition of youngsters towards recruitment.

DIFFERENTIAL READINGS FROM THE WORKING GEOGRAPHICAL PLACES

Factors that impulse entailment of youngsters in to the conflict and factors that favor recruitment prevention in each of the contexts of our work. Exercise that is product of communities themselves and that has as purpose the strengthening of protector factors and the diminution of risk factors in Cauca (afrocolombian and indigenous population) and in Altos de Cazucá and Usme. Youngsters that live in process of formation constitute into active prevention subjects.

1

CAUCAMUNICIPALITIES OF PUERTO TEJADA, SANTANDER DE QUILICHAO, PADILLA AND VILLA RICA,
WORK WITH AFROCOLOMBIAN YOUNGSTERS:

factors that favor recruitment

- ❑ Lost of the cultural identity. It exists and emptiness sensation and it seems it can be field with anything.
- ❑ There isn't enough Communitarian leadership in the road of rescuing cultural identity.
- ❑ Youngster's spaces are mediated by information that invites to war.
- ❑ Women have the willing and capacity for leadership that they can't materialize. This produces frustration that in some cases is reflected in early pregnancies and other expressions
- ❑ The feminine power is oriented and canalized in an inadequate way. In the domestic ambit this is evidenced in aggressive behavior towards their sons and daughters.
- ❑ Existence of an environment of fear and danger where being on the side of the armed constitutes a strategy of personal and communitarian protection.
- ❑ Gradual disappearance of communitarian and traditional dynamics of integration. Traditionally communitarian places have become into closed places wear fear and distrust reign.

factors that prevent recruitment

- ❑ A desire of participation and a search for different option exists among youngsters.
- ❑ Afrocolombian population count on a self cultural identity history from where they can re-knit the community.
- ❑ There are juvenile organizations in the region who work for the rescue of frocolombian history and culture.
- ❑ For the afrocolombian population river is a socialization place and a very important juvenile integration space.
- ❑ Afrocolombian joy and possibility of creating leisure spaces.
- ❑ The possibility of disposing formative elements of analysis of context, of conflict's resolution are important for preventing the recruitment.



2 CAUCA WORKING WITH PAEZ INDIGENOUS YOUNGSTERS OF THE "RESGUARDO PUEBLO NUEVO"

factors that favor recruitment

- ❑ Women that inside their communities don't have a leading role, when entailed to armed groups acquire power and recognition.
- ❑ In the zone, recruitment is done by insurgent groups with the participation of guerrilla indigenous women.
- ❑ Most youngsters are out of the educative system, without scholarization
- ❑ Inside the community there is not a category such as "young", seen as a person who goes thru a moment of personal development and requires special conditions for rising his/her potentialities.
- ❑ Youngsters assume adult responsibilities very early.
- ❑ Illegal crops disarticulate community and dynamics around it and it causes the loss of respect of the traditional authorities.
- ❑ Lack of economical and labor opportunities.
- ❑ It doesn't exist a good correlation between population growth and geographical territory. This causes a permanent migration and the searching of vital options outside the communities.
- ❑ Migrations cause a deep cultural dislocation. When this people return to their communities the lost of identity and self esteem become evident favoring armed groups with recruitment.

factors that prevent recruitment

- ❑ The town council is a valid mediator inside the community for promoting the respect for human rights. That is why the formation and training of the group members of the town council is so important.
- ❑ Handling of territory as a community. The strength of communitarian nets allows to control the external influences thanks to the deep existing family bonds, the recovery of Nasa's Cosmo vision and the understanding of a common language and symbology.
- ❑ Recovery of rituals favors the communitarian integration "saquelo".
- ❑ Existent Cosmo vision favors respect and preservation of the land (war goes against this).
- ❑ The "cleaning" rituals in lagoons to keep evil away, configures itself as a dynamic of humanitarian and communitarian growth
- ❑ There is an education center "Luis Angel Monroy" where youngsters count on an important formation spaces.
- ❑ There is a permanent work for recovering their historical memory. Sacred and community places take their names after people who have left an important memory in the community.
- ❑ Youngster's self-management in the frame of responsibility inside their community.
- ❑ Big convoking power for community mobilization .
- ❑ Aptitude and capacity for resistance that allows to face hard situations.

3 URBAN-MARGINAL CONTEXTS ALTOS DE CAZUCÁ AND SOACHA

factors that favor recruitment

- ❑ Generalized Violence context where life gets lost.
- ❑ Masculine referent is distorted by war image.

factors that prevent recruitment

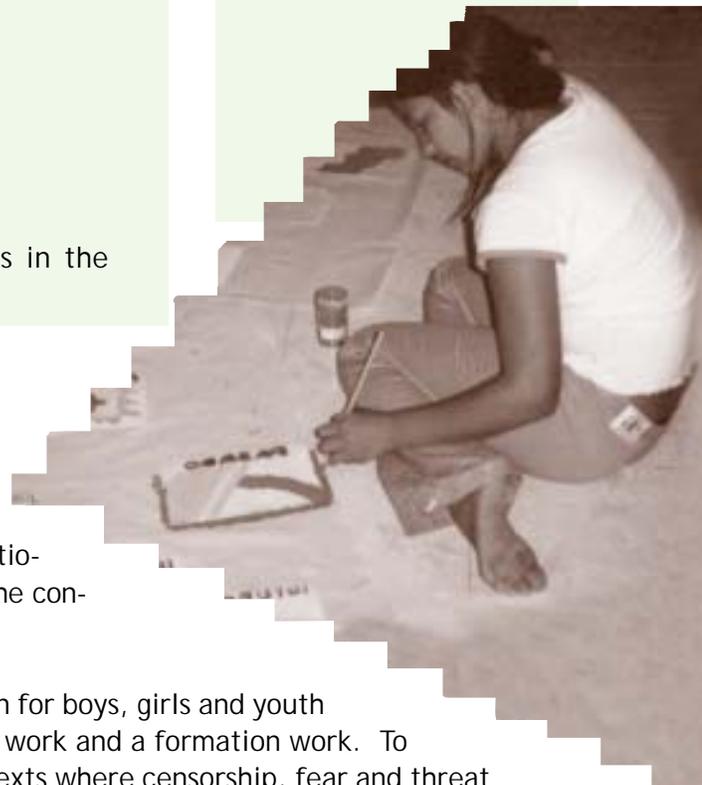
- ❑ There are still dreams and hope among youngsters that can be an important motor for their life transformation.



- ❑ In Altos de Cazucá there is a very complex generational conflict where youngsters are perceived as suspicious and dangerous.
- ❑ The different ways in which youngsters express themselves are criminalized.
- ❑ Adults in families and in community promote juvenile violent conduct.
- ❑ Mistreatment and abuse by community adults towards children and young men and women is evident.
- ❑ The strategy of armed groups of enlarging their strength in urban zones.
- ❑ Attraction for the warrior figure whose presence has become daily in this zone.
- ❑ Authoritarianism both in families and schools.
- ❑ Intolerance and ignorance of rights and citizen duties.
- ❑ Absence of recreational places.
- ❑ Disarticulation of organizations in the zone.
- ❑ The descolarization of over 60% children and youngsters in the sector

- ❑ The community counts on small places where trust can be build.
- ❑ The presence of different institutions on the zone.
- ❑ The presence of the Ombudsman's Office in the sector.
- ❑ Youngsters with a big potentiality.

Coalition File



SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS

In communities where basic rights are daily harmed, anger and it discourage are both accumulated. That is why it is necessary to reorient work in order to be able to canalize this emotions that, very frequently, are a factor that causes entailment to the conflict, specially in urban-marginal contexts and in women.

The artistic work constitutes as a good strategy of prevention for boys, girls and youth and must be accompanied in the same intensity by psychosocial work and a formation work. To facilitate the expression of emotions, which is necessary in contexts where censorship, fear and threat are constant, it is not convenient to work only with word and orality. The spoken media is not characteristic to all cultures and often has few words for the expression of feelings.

With all half possible, it is necessary to prioritize support to communities in relation with child protection. Prevention of the involvement of children and youngsters to the armed conflict has been more oriented towards incidence at an international level. Nevertheless together with this international work it is high-priority and necessary to develop actions in the local ambit, as an only way to promote an effective and efficient prevention.

At the same time, to wider prevention focus is necessary, because until now, resources and efforts have been mostly oriented towards demobilization, that is, to the effects but not the causes of the problem.

All this cannot be carried out if this situation is not visible, if it is not documented and if there isn't a regular reporting and monitoring about child recruitment in the specific zones.





childhood, school and armed conflict in Colombia



In October 2003, the Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth to the armed conflict in Colombia got together with the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations on the Right to Education, Mss. Katrina Tomasěvski. Next, you will find the most relevant concerns that were presented to the Rapporteur.

In the context of the degradation of the armed conflict and the deterioration of the situation human rights, there are several forms of violence that are practiced against children: crimes product of confrontations of the parties in war, disappearance and kidnapping, sexual violence, forced prostitution and entailment into the armed conflict.

In spite of the serious situation of Colombian children, until now, the State hasn't taken any measures that allow the protection of childhood in the armed conflict, such as the ratification of the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the participation of children on armed conflicts. In the same way, the Code of the Minor hasn't been modified, to make it compatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the protection of childhood's rights by means of facet and effi-

cient judicial resource might be affected by to constitutional reform project on the subject of justice administration presented on October 2002, that excludes this rights from the *tutela*¹ action.

The school, a battle field

The school is one of the most affected spaces by the armed conflict and in parallel; the right to education of children has been seriously harmed in reason of the conflict. The de-schoolarization, related to the forced displacement of children, to the closure of educative centers or just to fear, may favor the serious damages of their rights such as the sexual exploitation, child prostitution or the entailment to an armed group.

The affectation to the school is given in various ways:

On one hand, the presence of armed groups in the zone, with its consequent limitation of locomotion freedom, social control² and constant violent facts, hinder the assistance of children to school and generates in many cases stress symptoms, depression and inability to concentrate on academic activities.

On the other hand the schools, teachers and students are constant target of attacks, what has lead in some cases to the interruption to the service due to public order problems. In Medellin for instance, it was reported that in 2002 five schools of the No. 1 popular Neighborhood were closed, leaving more than 1900 students without school; four of this schools

¹ Inform of the High Commissioned of the United Nations for Human Rights about the situation of Human Rights in Colombia.

² It has been intensely denounced that paramilitaries execute a social control over the civilian population that affects specially teenagers. In Barrancabermeja, Perto Wilches, Canta Gallo, Buacaramanga and Cucuta they have emitted some "coexistence rules" with their sanctions that go from detentions, expulsion of the zone, haircut with machete, head and eyebrow shave, whips, forced works and death. This coexistence rules forbid youngster of wearing low necks or tops, establishes youngsters going out and staying at the street schedules, points punishments for bad academic production (See El Tiempo "Paramilitary prime in Barranca" February 19th 2002, Adital News, June 20th 2002, " Colombia : Paramilitaries punish youngsters with forced works"; El Tiempo, " Interview with Wilfredo Cañizares, director of the foundation Progresar for Human Rights" August 14th 2002 and Popular Feminine Organization, "Paramilitary terrorism grows in Barrancabermeja" June 11th 2003.



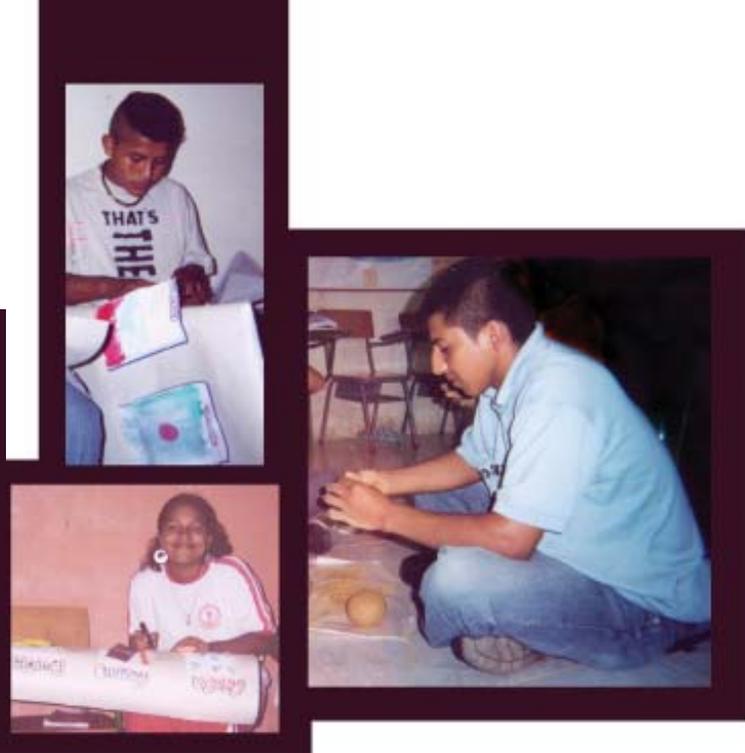
In Cundinamarca, FARC mined the surroundings of the rural school Potreritos, to which children of the villages Los Medios, San Antonio, Pascote and Brasil attend. The risk to which the actors of the conflict submit the students was accepted by an officer of the Contraguerrilla Battalion No. 67: *“At School there is a store where we eventually provision with supplies and cleaning elements. This could be the reason which motivated the guerrilleros.”*⁶

Education for war

For several years, the Coalition has been denouncing that the State involves children indirectly into the armed conflict, thru civic or communitarian programs in which even though they don't participate in military actions, they develop activities that have as a consequence the idealization of military actions, and of combatants as heroes, the interiorization of values around the war and a serious risk for the lives of children participating in this activities.⁷

The Army and the police have intervened various schools in marginal sectors to execute military strategy actions and “psychological actions” with the civilian population; in the schools they execute education works, military instruction and establish bases for their security activities.

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reopened this year with strong structural changes that implied the reduction of teachers and number of students that can attend.³

In the department of Cesar the Kankuamos indigenous people denounced that ELN murdered two students of San Isidro Labrador School for refusing to enter into their group. The indigenous pointed that from 500 students there were at school in 2002, there were only 300 left on 2003.⁴

Various rural school at Guamués Valley, department of Putumayo, had scattered their vegetable gardens to offer an alimentary support to the students that in many cases are in state of malnutrition and have to walk hours before arriving to school. The fumigations developed in the context of the eradication of illicit crops favored by Plan Colombia, have seriously affected this scholar crops, accentuating hunger in infant population and scholar desertion.

In the same way, armed actors make use of schools in different ways jeopardizing both student's lives and educative installations: in the context of “Operación Mariscal” carried out by the Police, Fiscalía, Army's Fourth Brigade and Air Force on May 2002, the State Armed Forces used as shield the building of Liceo Independencia, so the school was in the middle of confrontation during 8 hours.⁵

³ Data gathered by the Sector Communitarian Organizations, June 2002, September 2003.

⁴ El Tiempo, 20th February 2003, “kankuamos indigenous in Cesar run from the ELN recruitment”

⁵ El Tiempo, May 23rd, 2002. “It is unbelievable that the children were killed”

⁶ El Tiempo, “Army deactivated three mined fields of FARC in the surroundings of the school Gutiérrez (Cundinamarca)”, August 28th, 2003.

⁷ On July 13th 1998 ELN retained 15 women between them 11 girls from 13 to 17 years old, when they executed civic activities supporting the XIV Brigada of the Army in the town of Segovia, department of Antioquia, accusing them of collaborating with the enemy and warning them that they would be a target if they continued with this activity. Other youngsters have been murdered in departments such as Arauca and Putumayo for having affective relations with uniformed men of the opposite side of the contend.



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On the other hand, inside the educational system the existence of military schools and academies of basic and secondary education is contemplated in which "Technical in Military Orientation Graduates" finish their studies. Inside these schools, students at ninth, tenth and eleventh grade do the military service in a special modality which includes 1.300 military instruction hours and 3 campaign exercises during the 3 years; when they finish the instruction these youngsters obtain the first class military card and are enabled as combatants. In the same way, the minimum age for joining the Military School of Aviation is 16 years old.

The artillery battalion in Usme offers a high school validation program for scarce resource's youngsters where besides the studies, youngsters have military and ideological formation, as well as promises of getting a job.

This kind of services given by the Army may induce to the entailment of youngsters into the armed conflict. An organization informed about two 16 and 17 years old youngsters who were validating their high school at the Battalion; when they tried to reach them to receive their testimony, their whereabouts was a mystery, one of their mothers said that "he was working far away".⁸

The army develops to campaign called "Soldier for one day" that looks for the "integration of children with the army thru games and recreational activities and the visit of minors to the military installations around the country".⁹ This activities have included the visit of 2000 children to 3 battalions of the Army in Bucaramanga (Santander), in which boys and girls ride on armed cars, recognize helicopters and do camouflaged make up; the visit of students to the "Bohios de María School" in Medellín (Antioquia) to the Fourth Battalion of artillery, the visit of boys and girls of Kinder Gardens to the Boyacá Infantry Battalion in Pasto (Nariño) and activities in Cucuta (Norte de Santander) with a delegation of children from Táchira (Venezuela) that were visiting the city.

The "Soldier for a Day" program in Saravena, Arauca, was instituted as part of the integral plan of the Army for the zone of rehabilitation in Arauca. Every Thursday, groups of 20 children go to the Reveiz Pizarro

Battalion to play with the soldiers: they swim in the pool, gather on raffles, talk to the colonels, and go for a ride on a war tank. According to colonel Santiago Herrera, commandant of General Mechanized Group No.18 Gabriel Reveiz Pizarro, one of the objectives of the strategy is to make the "the son of the guerillero question his father." The group of psychological operations of the Army (GEOS) gives the children toy bills identical to the 20.000 pesos bills but that in the back invites the guerilleros to leave: "The devise is that children take it home and that way reaching parents and eldest siblings" affirmed a "bachiller" soldier¹⁰.

On May 19th, the General Attorney of Colombia made public the "Special Report on the rehabilitation and consolidation Zone in Arauca." The attorney's office recommended the suspension of the program "Soldiers for one day" that has been operating in the municipality of Saravena (Arauca), with the following arguments: "There are at least three reflections that force to think on evaluating and even suspending that program: (i) the entailment of children with the aim of making them conscient or unconsciously question the social and even political situations-like "the fact of their parents belonging to the insurgency" -, seems to be opposite to the level of psychical development of children and their own kind of vulnerability; (ii) it is notorious the risk into which minors are exposed while being in a place that could clearly be determined by illegal armed actors, as a military target, from there the absolute inconvenience of the army trying to gain the willing of children by jeopardi-

⁸ Information given by a Social Organization, October 2002.

⁹ <http://www.ejercito.mil.co>

¹⁰ Semana Magazine "The Recovery of Arauca" Feb. 2 to 8, 2003.



zing them, and (iii) the main mission of the army is not precisely educating kids, which doesn't mean that the presence of other specialized state institutions is not indispensable on the construction of values since childhood and in a civilian instruction that underlines the importance of state institutions and the moral advantages of the personal commitment with them."¹¹

And while the State thru its Armed Forces educates children for war, stigmatizes the education for peas and the formation on human rights: On the operation "Star Six", developed in *Comuna* three in Medellín (Antioquia), social leaders from the neighborhood and from the displaced community that develop educational activities with youth youngsters and children in topics related human rights where detained. In this respect colonel Rafael Mejia Roa, second commandant of Brigade No. 4, pointed that this persons where found with "documents and photographs that demonstrate that they where doing an ideological work with the community, spe-

chería", buying supplies, intelligence labors, delivery, mailing, sexual partners of the bosses, in charge of the recruitment of youngsters, fabrication of antipersonnel mines, taking care of kidnappeds, etc.

The army, UNICEF, and the Ombudsman's Office manage numbers that go from 7.000 to 15.000 boys and girls involved with guerrilla and paramilitary groups. According to UNICEF, Colombia is the third country on number of children soldiers after Congo and Liberia.¹³

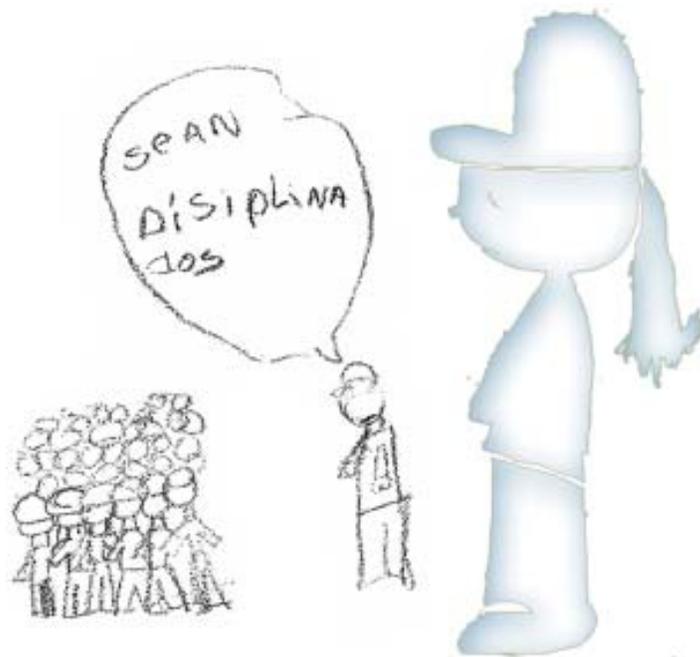
The entailment of children to any armed group exposes them to death in combat, when they try to escape, when they disobey orders, or when they don't have the ability of acting as they are asked to. All of them are exposed to other violations of their rights as tortures, sexual abuses and exploitation, lingering detention, separation of their families and harm to their right to educate.

An important amount of children entail into so called "voluntary way"¹⁴. Many of them unite to guerilla but most of them unite to paramilitary groups that promise them a salary; besides the economic causes, a lot of children get involved with armed groups to run away from home, due to family violence or the lost of a beloved one; some others want to "defend" or revenge their families from the attacks of the other group and some others unite because they fall in love with a combatant.

The Coalition has considered as "factors of entailment" those cultural, economic, politic, familiar and personal elements that by their own or

School, Entailment and prevention

The entailment of children is common, especially in rural zones and urban marginal zones of the country. The entailment includes but is not limited to the use of weapons. The armed groups count on "logistic personnel" whose labors may be very varied: cooking or "*ran-*



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¹¹ Data Bank of Human Rights and Political Violence, Cinep and Justicia y Paz, Boletín No.9, April 21st to May 20, 2003.

¹² Data Bank of Human Rights and Political Violence, Cinep and Justicia y Paz, Boletín No.6, December 19th 2002 to February 10th 2003.

¹³ Damian Perzonazz's Declarations, spokesperson of UNICEF on BBC World, "7.000 child soldiers in Colombia" June 13th, 2003.

¹⁴ The possibility of choosing between different options and the possibility of quitting this decision when the person considers it necessary must exist in order to talk of willingness. Having in mind, due to the State's absence and the non recognition of their rights, many children and youngsters don't have any other alternative that entering an armed group and that they can't leave the group with the same facility in which they entered the group, it is clear that in Colombia the voluntary entailment does not exist.



acting together, as in most of the cases, induce children and youth to get involved with one of the armed groups. Family, school and community might constitute protective elements for boys and girls, but also ejector elements that slowly motivate them to entail one of the groups in combat.

The violent relationships inside children's socialization space are cause and consequence of the conflict. In some regions where the prevailing logic is the one of an armed actor, violent practices of exclusion and discrimination for youngsters is legitimated. In this way the conflict promotes violence and the violence feeds a vicious circle of the dynamic of war.

In this context, the role of the school towards the prevention is very complex. Many youngsters express that their educative context and the opportunity that this offers

on formatting them and letting them relate to other youngsters and to adults, is a proper scenery for the acquisition of values and relationships opposite to war. Of course, the impossibility of its access is a factor tied to entailment.

Nevertheless, the topic requires various positions to avoid making simplistic readings of the relationship between both phenomenon.¹⁵

- In the first place the access to the scholar system is not by itself a barrier for entailment, just because cases indicate that having done the basic education cycle is not a warranty for a rejection attitude towards the war (it is sufficiently illustrative the amount of school graduate youngsters who look for getting in the army, the guerrillas and the paramilitary groups.)
- The place of school on the field of entailment is also ambivalent and complex. It is a encounter place for children and young man and women coming from different sidewalks and neighborhoods, its installations are used for communitarian events and is considered a social patrimony of first order. But it is also a spas of constant presence of armed groups that, besides other things, look for the recruitment of students.

In some regions such as Chocó Cundinamarca, Cauca, Casanare, Arauca, and Suba and Ciudad Bolivar in Bogotá, the school has become a recruitment spas, in occasions with the support of some teachers.¹⁶ In Vaupés, FARC developed two integration days between September and October 2002 in two school in Pirá-Paraná Zone in which they did sport encounters with young men and women and encouraged them to enter the rows.

After these 2 days, at least 7 youngsters entered in the guerilla.¹⁷

- Teachers "have been the target of the different armed groups" for the threats they receive or because these threats have been accomplished.
- Teachers many times do preventive labors or receive demobilized children and youngsters. Their role in prevention is hindered by the solitary experience, out of any support program.

When the relation between school, entailment and indigenous groups is analyzed the problem gets even more complex. In fact many young indigenous enter to western-like schools, which make them loose ties with their community and cultural identity, elements that frequently permit to protect children and foment the cohesion between individuals and families. In the same way, these indigenous youngsters are prepared with curriculums that don't adapt to the cultural needs of their communities making, them many times being more isolated from their communities when they finish their formal education. Being far away from their culture and community, they become an easy target for pressures or invitations of armed groups.

¹⁵ Collective of Conscience objectors, for the Coalition's prevention committee.

¹⁶ Coalition workshop with social leaders, Bogotá, May 2002

¹⁷ Interview with social promoter for indigenous communities in Vaupés, second quarter, 2003





to the Colombian State

-  To implement in a coherent and integrated way public politics for childhood and youth that include educative and other alternatives to prevent youngsters to entail to the armed conflict and implement mechanisms so that they can fully execute their human rights.
-  To eliminate the program "Soldiers for a day" and other programs of education and formation for children by the State Armed Forces.

-  The State Armed Forces must guarantee the protection of children, keeping unconditional respect to every infrastructure, program, activity that give services to childhood and specially schools, kinder gardens, by abstaining in those places of :

- Developing military operations
- Installing military bases, camps, garnishes, security organism's headquarters or police stations.
- Developing activities that jeopardize children (supply, recreation etc.)

-  To develop in schools of zones highly affected by the armed conflict a formation process for teachers and students, with the aim of offering them tools for the overcoming of traumas and the management of stress produced by the conflict.

-  To establish proper measures for the cease of attacks against boys and girls, teachers and educative infrastructures.



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to the parts in conflict

-  Committing themselves to not entailing people under the age of 18 years old to their groups in any case and for any type of activity.
-  To establish humanitarian commitments that include demobilization and adequate attention to all the people under 18 in their groups; the non entailment of children to the armed conflict, the respect to boys and girls as civilian population; the unconditional respect to all the infrastructure, programs or activities that give to service to childhood and the protection of children towards the forced displacement.



ELSE

SOMETHING

AND

AGENDA

COLOMBIAN COALITION ACTIVITIES

During the last quarter of 2003, the Coalition has carried out prevention workshops with youngsters and communitarian leaders in Putumayo, Cauca and Bogotá, as well, as intern reflection workshops about the prevention strategy that has been developing.



INTERNATIONAL COALITION ACTIVITIES

During the last quarter of 2003, members of the International Secretariat traveled to the Democratic Republic of Congo and to Colombia to participate in meetings with National and Regional Coalitions.

On September 18th the Coalition carried out a lecture about childhood and armed conflict. The event was developed at the Office of the High Commissioner of United Nations for Human Rights and it counted with the participation of Dr. Beatriz Linares, Delegate Defender for Childhood and Family, and Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, member of the board of directors of Human Rights Watch and Robin Kirk, the principal specialist on Colombia from the Americas Division in Human Rights Watch.

Between 27th and 31st October there was an extraordinary meeting carried out in Bogotá of Latin American Coalitions. On the frame of this mission, that had the participation of the International Secretariat's Coordinator and the program officer for Latin America, meetings with representatives of ICBF; Ombudsman's Office, the High Commissioner for Peace, UNICEF, UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNHCHR, the Austrian Embassy and the European Union were held.

On October 28th the Coalition and the Office of Human Rights of the ESAP summoned the forum "Childhood, armed conflict and State: The role of state officials on prevention, demobilization and attention", that counted with the participation of 300 persons, between students, national and international NGO's members, and state officials.

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On November, the Coalition sustained a closed door meeting with diplomatic representatives of States members of the Security Council and presented a report about the use of child soldiers in Colombia and Asia in an international conference organized by the Spanish Red Cross in Valencia.

On January the IS Coordinator, Casey Kelso, presented to the Security Council of United Nations the report "Child Soldiers Use 2003" within their Fourth Debate about childhood and armed conflict. The report includes Colombia and 17 other countries on Africa, Middle East and Asian South East.