

**Open Debate of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict,
New York,
12 February, 2008**

Mr. President:

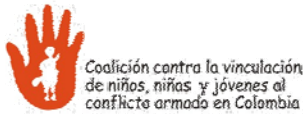
The organization signatories to this declaration wish to acknowledge the progress with regard implementation of Security Council Resolution 1612 and the consolidation of task forces in various situations of armed conflict around the world. We equally wish to highlight the importance of the Un Secretary General Annual Report for Civil Society Organizations as regards our task to monitor and follow up recommendations.

Likewise, we wish to express our serious concern for the worsening of conditions for children in recent years, in the framework of the Colombian armed conflict and the grave and systematic violations of human rights. Thousands of boys and girls live in circumstances of alienation, facing complex realities of violence both in the private and public scenarios. Clashes and power struggles between the parties to the conflict (guerrilla forces, paramilitary groups and state armed forces) have seriously affected children who are the frequent victims of murder, recruitment, sexual violence, imposition of codes of conduct, use of their schools by members of illegal armed groups and state armed forces, deprivation of their freedom, forced displacement- internally and sometimes even outside the country-, amongst other situations.

The alarming levels of use and involvement of children in the armed groups is a situation of the utmost concern. During 2006 and 2007 the Colombian state control bodies (Office of the Attorney-General and the Ombudsman office), UN Agencies and Non Governmental Organizations received information confirming such situation. In the departments of Antioquia and Bolívar, paramilitary groups, despite undergoing a negotiation process with the current administration and in utter disregard for the cease fire promise, have continued systematically recruiting and moving children from one area to another, by means of deceptions and threats. As far as the guerrilla groups is concerned, recruitment by FARC-EP members has been verified in the departments of Arauca, Putumayo, Guaviare, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Meta, Risaralda, Vaupés, Amazonas, Antioquia, Cundinamarca, Bolívar and Chocó. Equally, there is information proving that former child combatants have been subject to military interrogations and used by the state armed forces for intelligence tasks thus putting their lives at serious risk.

As your annual report stated in 2007, the increase in murders and extrajudicial executions of boys and girls perpetrated by armed groups taking part in the conflict is of great concern, particularly those committed by the state armed forces.

In this context, the situation of Colombian children becomes increasingly alarming. Due to the internal armed conflict, young women and girls have been the object of discrimination and acts of sexual and gender violence perpetrated by the various armed groups taking part in the hostilities. Rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and propagation of sexually transmitted diseases are all acts which greatly affect their right to a life free from violence and to the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health. From an early age, girls involved in the armed groups are the victims of numerous forms of violence such as sexual abuse, forced contraception and abortion to name but a few violations to their fundamental rights.



The situation detailed above establishes the importance of a full implementation of a monitoring and reporting mechanism created by Resolution 1612 of the Security Council, in order to improve coordination, at the national level, of fact recollection, monitoring and analyses; respond to situations noticed and maintain a permanent verification process on the part of the United Nations System and the organized civil society. Furthermore, it opens a major scenario for public debate which will enable social organizations and the United Nations System to design proposals for action and make recommendations that contribute to the work of the Colombian state in terms of prevention, protection and attention to children who are victims of the conflict.

As stated recently by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the MRM significantly contributes to the fulfillment of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and thus, the Committee calls on the States to collaborate with the Special Representative in order to aid its implementation.

On the other hand the MRM makes it possible to bring the voices and needs of the communities, who have experienced human rights violations and breaches of IHL, to the relevant scenarios and authorities without risking their personal integrity. It also guarantees information confidentiality in an expedient and coordinated manner so that measures responding to such problems and needs can be adopted.

Based on the considerations stated above we wish to express that:

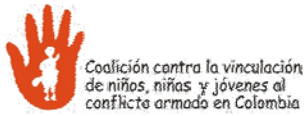
Equal inclusion within MRM of all situations of armed conflict where children are the victims of acts perpetrated by the parties to the conflict must be impending. Various states have affirmed the latter during the open debates in previous years and so has the Secretary General on his reports for 2006 and 2007. A decision by the UN Security Council in this regard would positively contribute to widening a protective framework of the International system, consolidating the issue of children and armed conflict as of worldwide interest.

We consider it fundamental to welcome and implement the recommendation of the UN Secretary General in relation to giving equal weight to all analyzes categories and not only to the one regarding involvement of children in the ranks of armed groups and forces.

We wish to underline the spirit of Resolution 1612 as a means for the protection of children to be considered as an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and so that it does not turn into a means to favor political interests.

We urge that Colombian paramilitary groups which, under other names, continue perpetrating acts to the detriment of children be consider as parties responsible for the recruitment and use of children, in accordance with the Appendix II of the list provided by the UN Secretary General Report before the Council.

The Colombian civil society welcomes the government of Colombia acceptance of the Monitoring and Report Mechanism (MRM), in order to make the issue visible and count on an instrument in favor of improving the situation of Colombian children. As the Secretary General stated in its recent report, the recollection of information on countries such as the Philippines and Colombia is a challenge that must be taken on with full seriousness and thoroughness, given the characteristics and obstacles generated by the context of political violence and of the armed



conflict. We strongly urge the United Nation System to ensure that the working group in Colombia comprised by UN agencies, NGO and State public ministry (Ombudsman office and Office of the Attorney-General) form the foundation of the country task force.

Finally, we wish to express the importance of a country mission visit by the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Mrs. Sra. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in order to foster high-level advocacy actions on issues of children and armed conflict and to assist the authorities, United Nations and civil society partners in improving the situation of children in armed conflict¹.

Coalition against the Involvement of Boys, Girls and Youth to the Armed Conflict:

Colectivo de objetores y objetoras de conciencia - ACOOC
Fundación Creciendo Unidos
Fundación para la Educación y el Desarrollo – FEDES
JUSTAPAZ
Taller de Vida
Tierra de hombres –Alemania
Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados
Benposta Nación de Muchachos

Colombian Commission of Jurists

¹ Children and Armed Conflict, Report of the Secretary-General, a document by the United Nations: A/62/609–S/2007/757, Par. 151.