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Child Soldiers: The Colombian Case

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Introduction

The massive recruitment of boys and girls younger every time in Colombia and in other nations has become part of the strategic adaptation and survival of illegal armed actors. For this reason also Colombia has entered the agenda of the Security Council of the United Nations. Local Colombian newspapers have quoted a report that argues that 14,000 children, mostly girls are working either behind the scenes or in the frontlines for the guerrilla groups such as FARC or ELN in the internal war the country is holding. It has also been reported that the Colombian government's Armed Military Forces have used the services of children as informants putting their lives at imminent risk.

Background

A 40-year conflict between government forces and anti-government insurgent groups and illegal paramilitary groups - both heavily funded by the drug trade – has been escalating since the 1990s. According to the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States the “insurgents lack the military or popular support necessary to overthrow the government, and violence has been decreasing since about 2002, but insurgents continue attacks against civilians and large swaths of the countryside are under guerrilla influence”. More than 46,000 former paramilitaries have been demobilized by the end of 2007 and the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) as a formal organization had ceased to function. Still, some renegades such as the Aguilas Negras in the region of Chocó continue to engage in criminal activities¹.

¹ CIA FactBook, 15 April 2008 < <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>>

According to the Amnesty International Country Report of Colombia in 2007 serious human rights abuses remained at high levels, especially in rural areas, despite continued reductions in certain types of violence associated with Colombia's long-running internal armed conflict, in particular kidnappings and killings. All parties to the conflict - the security forces and paramilitaries as well as guerrilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) and the smaller National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN) – have continued to abuse human rights and breach international humanitarian law. They are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although there was a fall in the number of people newly displaced by the conflict, but the large number of displaced people remained a concern. There are continued attacks on trade unionists and human rights defenders, mainly by paramilitary groups. These four decades of armed conflict between the government and drug-trafficking militias have resulted in a humanitarian crisis that constantly threatens the rights of Colombia's women and children.

International and National Protection

Most of the actors involved in the Colombian conflict have signed pacts where they have committed not to use children and minors in their armies. The reality shows that these pacts have never been met. The evidence points in another direction. As the armed groups such as the FARC-EP move deeper into the jungle and the borders they are recruiting more children from Colombian and Brazilian indigenous tribes and afro-Colombians.

The FARC in June 1999 vowed to the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General not to use children, so did in 1998 the ELN and civil society representatives in Germany with the Door to Heaven Agreement (La Puerta del Cielo) not to use children in their army. The

use of boys and girls in armed conflict violates humanitarian law of the 1949 Geneva Convention, violates rights of children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of the UN General Assembly of 10 December 1948.

In 1996 the United Nations published a landmark report by the secretary general's expert on children and armed conflict, Graça Machel, about the effects of war on children. (in 2000, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing protection of war-affected children came out*). In April that year, the U.N. team held a regional consultation in Bogotá whose recommendations included "developing programs for the psychosocial recuperation of children, their rehabilitation and care. Access to these services should be seen as a basic right of all children, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child." ²

During the same month, then-President Andrés Pastrana's ministers signed a declaration of intent to rescue children from the destructive effects of the conflict and in 1999 provisions were developed prohibiting the use of child soldiers in the Colombian army.

Why Child Soldiers

A child is easier to persuade than an adult. This makes them an easier target; secondly adults unlike children have more chances of security through a job, family or home. Needless to say armed groups are in constant recruitment because a bigger army allows for a more successful campaign in battle or influence in a specific area. Another reason is that Children are led to become often very good fighters.

According to Pax Christy Netherlands³, many children and young people are not really aware of how dangerous it is to fight in a war. They are often less afraid of being wounded than adult soldiers, and they do not tend to hide or run away. The armed parties know this, and are therefore happy to have child soldiers in their armies. Child soldiers

² <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/18.htm>, visited on 30 June 2008.

³ http://www.paxchristi.nl/UK/areas_of_conflict_latin_america_colombia.htm, visited on 30 June 2008.

sometimes also have to take the lead when the troops attack or set an ambush this is called in Colombia as “carne de canon”, and they are the first to receive the bullets so that the other soldiers can survive the first attack and can charge in the second surge.

Yet another reason why children are recruited is that they are good at different task such as exploration of an area, delivering messages because the enemy might not suspect them to be soldiers or can be used to clear land mines since they are more expendable than other higher rank soldiers. “Displacement and child militia are not simply unrelated outcomes of war; they are often deeply inter-connected. Whether during war or in “peace,” there actually appears to be a strong relationship between the risk of recruitment during displacement and the risk of displacement as an outcome of recruitment.”⁴ This shows the complexities involved.

General Situation of Colombian Child Soldiers

A child soldier is a fighter under the age of 18. But a child soldiers does not necessarily have to be in the frontlines of the combat to be considered a child soldier. Any situation that puts a child in risk for the benefit of an armed group or any child that engages in labor for an armed group is considered a child soldier. This includes messengers, spies as well as the cooks, sex slaves and maids that are used by these groups. “Mission Diplomatique Rwanda 1994”, an NGO published a detailed report of the situation of child soldiers in Colombia with numbers of the Colombian case.⁵

⁴Charles Geisler, *Niousha Roshani Cornell University*.

<http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia240.htm>

⁵ COLOMBIA:

Nº OF MINOR SOLDIERS: 11.000 to 14.000

ARMED GROUPS:

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) –in process of demobilization–

Aguilas Negras, Renacer, el Cacique Pipinta, Bloque Antisubversivo del Sur, Nueva Generacion de Nariño, Autodefensas Unidas del Casanare, Bloque Llaneros del Casanare, Los Rastrojos, Los Traquetos, Vencedores de San Jorge(Cordoba) y Autodefensas Campesinas Unidas del Norte- linked to drug trafiking , that operate in Magdalena, Antioquia, Santander, Cesar, Bolivar, La Guajira, Huila, Putumayo, Choco and Caqueta, Autodefensas Unidas del Valle de Cauca
 REASON FOR CONFLICT: Control of natural resources and drug traffic.⁶

It is estimated that in Colombia there are between 11,000 and 14,000 children in the armed conflict. This means that one out of four combatants is a child. Children as young as six years old have been recorded to be used in the conflict for duties of intelligence, spying, setting up land mines or carrying explosives⁷.

In Colombia there is a very particular phenomenon as previously presented, which is the constant rise of new and emerging bands that are linked with the business of drug trafficking. Therefore they are armed groups that train children in military strategy, how to handle small guns and are generally used for spying and transportation. Some girls are used as cooks and maids. They are also exposed to cruel and inhuman punishment.

These groups, such as the Aguilas Negras, Manos Negras, Organización Nueva Generación or the Rastrojos, mentioned by the 'Mission Diplomatique Rwanda' are alleged to be largely involved in criminal activities related especially to drug trafficking and control of either crops or transportation routes to export the drugs. The Government considers these groups as criminal gangs. In June 2007, Aguilas Negras was reported to have coerced children to join their ranks. According to a report from the UN Secretary General, evidence on the recruitment and use by the other three groups mentioned above has also been

Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
 Emerging Bands formed by undemobilized paramilitaries:

⁶ Mission Diplomatique Rwanda 1994. February 12, 2008

⁷ Amnesty International Report 2007: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/americas/south-america/colombia#report>

received. Furthermore, the report adds that these groups have been only partially demobilized, and it is believed that children are still present in those groups

But as previously added the problem of recruitment children in the Colombian conflict does not only affect Colombian children but also children from bordering nations. There have been reported cases of armed groups forcibly recruiting in Brazil where children from indigenous tribes who have little state- or community protection against these armed groups.

There is a lot of evidence to support the fact that the FARC continues to recruit and use children. According to a report from the UN Secretary General cases have been reported in the Departments of Cauca, Antioquia, Sucre, Bolivar, Cundinamarca, Guaviare, Meta and Nariño. “In Corinto, Cauca Department, members of FARC frequently visit schools to persuade children to join their ranks.”⁸ Furthermore, the ELN continues these practices as well despite current talks with the Government and demands by the National Council for Peace. “In December 2006, two girls aged 14 and 15 were forcibly recruited by ELN in Nariño, municipality of Guachavez-Santa Cruz.” But not only do the illegal armed forces use child soldiers but there have also been cases reported in which the Colombian Government and the National Army use children for intelligence purposes. Although the Colombian law forbids this action it still has occurred. On 6 March 2007, the Colombian Ministry of Defense prohibited all members of the armed forces from using children for intelligence activities, especially children recovered from illegal armed groups which were used for area recognition purposes or to give information on the lives of the group leaders.

⁸UN General Assembly, *Children and armed conflict : report of the Secretary-General*, 21 December 2007. A/62/609-S/2007/757. Online. UNHCR Refworld, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=479f54592>>

This further jeopardized the children's lives by making them targets for the value of their information. However, the 'Defensoría del Pueblo' (ombudsman) reported that in Cauca, a child demobilized from FARC was used as an informant for the armed forces in an operation and was later killed at the age of 19 years while in combat with FARC⁹.

The national 'Instituto de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses' has certified that 37 children, including 13 girls and 24 boys, were killed and 34 children, including 4 girls, were injured allegedly by the National Army or the Police Forces, of which, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), nine cases have been filed by the Judicial Police. Extrajudicial executions by some Government security forces have also been reported. In March 2007, two people, including one 16-year-old boy, were killed by the National Army. According to eyewitness accounts, those killed were subsequently presented as guerrilla members.

The life of a child soldier in Colombia is hard and dangerous. Children have to walk long distances with their heavy weapons and backpacks through the woods, and they often go hungry. They have to take part in fighting or to carry out dangerous duties.

Boys Recruitment

As already discussed there are over 11,000 children that participate directly in frontal combat or engage in logistical duties such as spying, messenger or sex slaves. The median age of recruitment is 12 years. This is because when the children are this age they are easier to influence and are easily attracted by the uniform, the "prestige" of making part of an armed group and by the financial interests that enlisting represents (or the promise of

⁹UN General Assembly, *Children and armed conflict : report of the Secretary-General*, 21 December 2007. A/62/609-S/2007/757. Online. UNHCR Refworld, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=479f54592>>

an income). Joining an armed group allows for some sort of ‘protection’ and the security of a daily meal. The manipulation even leads to alcohol and drug addictions to prepare the children for battle and to make them dependant on the armed group.

The use of drugs is very common in many conflicts and the drug of choice used in the Colombian case is either “Aguardiente” (a Colombian high %tage alcohol) or “basuco”, a street drug that is the lowest of the low in drugs. It is a combination of residues of other drugs as well as construction material dust such as brick dust. It is smoked by a pipe and is highly addictive. It is used to dominate and destroy the conscience of the children so that they can be ordered to commit any type of action against human dignity.

Some of the children join the conflict that is around them, some to run away from the child abuse from members of their family. A high portion of internally displaced persons in Colombia are children from information (Mission Diplomatique Rwanda 1994). This makes the recruiting of children easy. Other important factors that influence children to be more vulnerable to join the war is poverty, lack of education and the absence of a social connection of some kind, such as a connection with a church or a soccer team in the community.

The armed parties often make fine sounding promises to these children and tell them, for example, that they will be paid good wages. It has been reported that child soldiers are indeed sometimes paid wages, but after that they have to fight for nothing. Many armed parties also try to win the children over by repeatedly telling them how fantastic it is to be a fighter and that if their armed group wins the war the situation in Colombia will improve.

Another reason why children join the armed groups is for vengeance, with the purpose of killing the assassin of their mother or father and the raids committed by soldiers. The robberies and the terror the towns are exposed to create hatred in the children can be utilized in recruitment. A newer mode of recruitment of the last years has been the kidnapping of children as young as nine years old. This new strategy has the idea that younger children if raised by the armed group can create attachment to the groups and the forced ideals of it.

Children that participate in armed conflict often die or fall wounded in combat. If not then they are forced to do hazardous tasks such as setting up land mines, handle explosives or use weapons. According to “Mission Diplomatique Rwanda 1994”, 30% of the victims of land mines are children. Boys and girls in war live in humiliating conditions for childhood with insufficient food and little or no access to health services. In most cases they are treated cruelly, they are beaten and humiliated in order for them to try hard to gain the leaders respect. The punishment that comes with making a mistake or deserting are very harsh or even life threatening.

The decision of participating in an armed conflict often is determined by the economical, social structures as well as community and family structures that crumble in situations of armed conflict. In times like these the only way to survive for children can be to join in the ranks of armed forces. Poverty and lack of access to education or the job market are important factors that allow many young men to join the new organized delinquency gangs that are transforming armed conflict into an urban conflict.

In the new wave of the war brought by President Uribe’s “Democratic Security” policy, afro Colombian and indigenous children are the primary victims of recruitment

because they are located in the areas of interest of the armed groups. The main way in which children are brought into the conflict is by making them work in the coca plantations which are directly linked to the conflict due to the profits it creates for the armed groups. A profit that is used to keep the conflict alive. Once the children are working in the crops they are trained militarily as a reward for their good work and “move up” in the military ladder to a position of soldier.

The prevalence of small guns and light weapons that is seen in the Colombian society and especially in the areas of conflict continues to be an important factor that allows for recruitment of child soldiers. These weapons are cheaper every time, sometimes subsidized by armed groups, are easy to use and carry. Therefore they can be given to the children and taught how to be used.

In a rare public comment, Commander Mariana of the FARC-EP’s Thematic Work Group acknowledged and defended the FARC-EPs continued recruiting of children:” We do have large numbers of young persons over 15 years of age in our ranks. They dream of a better country for their families, for themselves, and for all those who endure similar conditions. Therefore they made the decision to enlist in the FARC. We even admit, in exceptional cases, persons under that age, because neither the State nor society, nor even their families, are prepared to offer them a chance to lead a decent life. Let’s not be shocked at this. Instead, let’s look at the options that this society that criticizes us offers them: street begging, joining delinquent gangs in deprived urban districts, resorting to prostitution, joining gangs of paid killers...there should be no war...unfortunately, those who hold the

economic and political power in our country have left the Colombian people no other option than an uprising”.¹⁰

Girls Recruited

The girls are not searching for ways to retaliate and bring harm to those who had used and misused them. They were looking for ways to make a contribution, to do something meaningful and productive with their life and to make up for the harm they have delivered upon others. While the most common picture is that of a boy holding and AK-47, we must not forget all the girls that are behind the lines and in the camps tending to the soldiers, tending to them either by cooking or doing chores or by being sex slaves.

In Colombia, the armed groups leaders have girls as their girlfriends, whom they make abort, they are raped and turned into domestic slaves. Another worrying aspect of leaders choosing girls as their “preferred” partners turns them into a military objective for the rival armed group. The raping of girls and sexual slavery, forced prostitution as well as other forms of brutality has been increasing in the last years. When girls join the armed groups and suffer abuses and rape they are often rejected once they return to their communities of origin. This makes the reintegration process very hard.

Life as a child soldier, for the girls, often began with the information that if you did not want to stay with the guerrillas after three days or some other established short period of time you would be free to leave. The girl had been assured, by the guerrillas, of her right to leave before she went with them. If the request to leave was invoked by the girl it was made

¹⁰*Charles Geisler, Niousha Roshan Cornell University:*
<http://www.colombiajournal.org/colombia240.htm>

known that it did not apply to her and she was there for three years not three days or some other long-term period.¹¹

“Contraceptive injections are routine, even when the girls object. The injections are as much a part of training as the weapons. All pregnancies were the fault of the girl. The girl is held responsible and forced to end the pregnancy by having an abortion. The girls recognized that their life would be easier if they were in a partner relationship with a commander. They had fewer duties to perform, they had privileges regarding supplies, they were able to ride rather than walk long distances and others granted you some respect and listened to you. They discovered in battle that the radio was more important than their life; ‘if you failed to protect the commander if you were his bodyguard, you would be killed; that the commander might abandon the troops in battle, and the troops were left to make it on their own and each person was on his or her own; you were ordered to kill others; and that at any moment you could be killed’, testimony from a Colombian girl soldier (record on file with the author).

Demobilization and Reintegration

Positive efforts have been made by the Government in the demobilization of Combatants from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) or paramilitaries. According to official figures, “63 children were demobilized from AUC in 2006, compared with 17,581 adults. Those children, however, were not formally handed over according to

¹¹ Kearns, Yvonne: The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers.
<http://www.quno.org/newyork/Resources/girlSoldiersColombia.pdf>

the requirements of the collective demobilization process, and there are concerns that a number of children have been missed out in that process”¹².

When the demobilization process ended with the paramilitaries, only 10% of the children estimated to be fighting for them were given up¹³. Many of those children were returned home by their leaders so that they would not have to suffer sanctions for the recruitment for children. Although returning the children home is a good step, the correct step would have been to return them through the government Demobilization and Reintegration process that is more equipped to handle the children and their traumas better.

But the armed parties obviously do not want child soldiers to leave, and they make them afraid, they may escape or be taken captive until they give themselves up. But after that it is often not possible for child soldiers to return to their own parents. Many people in their old village know that they were a fighter and think that they still have contact with their armed party, which is dangerous. Therefore most child soldiers have to go to family members (a grandmother or an aunt) who live in a different part of the country, or they go to a state-run home.

The psychological trauma of children affected by conflict makes it very hard for them to adapt to their new environment, school and home after they have been reintegrated to society. In many cases the mothers or foster care parents fear for the common nightmares that the children are having. Apart from the fear of their new environment they also are apprehensive of their new security because it is a tense one. This is because they often are discriminated and suspected of having been collaborators of some armed group and might

¹²UN General Assembly, *Children and armed conflict : report of the Secretary-General*, 21 December 2007. A/62/609-S/2007/757. Online. UNHCR Refworld, available at: <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=479f54592>>

¹³ Mission Diplomatique Internationale Humanitaire Rwanda 1994. 12 February 2008.

still be collaborating. In areas where there is wide presence of reintegrated persons from armed groups it is observed that in schools of the area where the children now study, that violent acts and fights are more common than in schools where the amount of former child soldiers is less.

“It is very difficult for former child soldiers to get used to life in such a home”¹⁴. It may well be that they no longer have to fight, and always have something to eat, but they often feel closed in. They miss their friends in the armed party and they are also far from their family. They usually have no idea what they want to be when they grow up and how they will earn their money. Many children sometimes feel so lost that they even return to an armed party or wander the streets.

The Government of Colombia, through the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, has carried out programmatic efforts to prevent the recruitment of children and to reintegrate children into their communities. To date, the Government’s efforts have benefited 3,326 children previously associated with illegal armed groups (records on file of the author).

Organizations such as UNICEF know how difficult it is for former child soldiers to find a place again in normal life. UNICEF therefore says that 'prevention is better than cure'. What they mean is that it is better to prevent even more children becoming child soldiers in the first place. UNICEF and other organizations tell the armed parties repeatedly that it is forbidden to recruit young people under the age of 18 into their armies. But they also help local communities to make the life of young people a little easier and more

¹⁴**Contribution to the Dutch "Stop the use of Child Soldiers" campaign**

The campaign is a joint action by various Dutch NGOs (including Pax Christi Netherlands) against the use of Child Soldiers throughout the world.

pleasant. They set up schools, organize entertaining activities for young people and tell families that they should not make the children work too hard. Perhaps then children will not be so quick to be persuaded to become child soldiers.

The Justice and Peace Law of the Colombian government has different aspects such as "rural reinsertion" programs by which the government will finance agro-industrial projects which bring together peasant farmers, displaced people and demobilized paramilitaries. According to the Amnesty International Country report on Colombia in 2007 the Justice and Peace Law, was to be applied to around 2,600 of the more than 30,000 paramilitaries who had reportedly demobilized, records on file of the author.

On 22 January 2003 the government published Decree 128, which amended Laws 548 (1999) and 782 (2002), dealing with the reintegration of voluntarily demobilized soldiers, including child soldiers. Article 22 of Decree 128 forbids the use of children in intelligence activities by any group, including armed forces.¹⁵ However Article 13 of the decree could also provide amnesty for paramilitaries and members of armed groups who recruit or use children in hostilities.¹⁶

According to the Colombian Defense Ministry, 110 children were demobilized between January and June 2003. Most had escaped or were captured by government forces. On 12 June 2003, 40 soldiers aged between 14 and 17 were released to the government and the UNICEF for demobilization. The Colombian press reported that the ELN had also

¹⁵ Decreto número 128 de 2003.

<http://bib.minjusticia.gov.co/normas/decretos/2003/d01282003.htm>.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch January 2003

<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/childsoldiers0104/5.htm>>

liberated some child soldiers.¹⁷ On 20 August 2003, the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace announced that the demobilization of AUC members would begin in September and that by the end of the year between 1,500 and 2,000 members of AUC would be demobilized. It was not known whether any special provision would be made for children (record on file of the author).

In 1997 the Government's Institute for the Welfare of Children and Families was set up to address the rehabilitation of child soldiers and their re-integration into society. Special centers for de-mobilized children were established in 1999 all over the country with the support of Save the Children UK. The program today has the capacity to receive 250 children, who have either escaped or been captured, at any one time. It is made up of three reception centers, seven specialist centers and twelve safe houses.¹⁸

The solution for the demobilized children lies in education, either formal education or a vocational training that allows for skills for specific trades. In the Colombian scenario most vocational teaching has concentrated in computer skills for boys and nursing for girls. Apart from this there is also a social integration program with the community, church or through sports. The purpose of this is to empower the children or young adults so that they are not forced to join the armed groups again. Finally there is family reunification, but if there is no such case then there is a mentor program since the children become very attached to their leaders in the armed groups.

Problem and Solution:

¹⁷ UN news, "Colombia: UNICEF welcomes demobilization of 40 child soldiers", 13 June 2003

¹⁸ Erika Paez, October 2002. <http://www.eenet.org.uk/newsletters/news7/page11.shtml>

The immense, forced enlistment of boys and girls forms part of the strategic adaptation and survival of illegal armed groups. The recorded success of President Alvaro Uribe “Democratic Security” has forced the FARC further into the jungle and near the borders of the country. These neglected areas deep in the jungle are great recruitment areas of afro-Colombian and indigenous children. Therefore the Government has to analyze its war strategy because although successful in recuperating urban areas it is pushing them too far into jungle territory where the guerrillas are gaining strength through “rejuvenated” soldiers.

There have been 4,000 demobilized children according to government statistics through the Demobilization and Reintegration process of the government. But the program needs to reach further with more international and national support of entities such as the Canadian International Developing Agency which has become a key partner in reintegrating children.

Conclusion

The use of children as soldiers increases inhumanity of conflict. It facilitates to start a given conflict, more difficult to end it and more likely to recur. For this reason the government of Colombia has the duty to set in motion economic and social development strategies that target children so that they are more linked to the Colombian community as well as evaluate its military strategy against the rebel groups which is allowing them to recruit hundreds of children in neglected corners of the country.

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UN Security Council to Discuss Colombia's Child Soldier, New York, February 22, 2005, **“The United Nations has recognized that both guerrillas and paramilitaries violate fundamental humanitarian standards by relying on children to fight. These horrific practices are causing immeasurable damage to Colombia's children, and to Colombian society as a whole.”**
José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director for Human Rights Watch

"Stop the use of Child Soldiers" campaign The campaign is a joint action by various Dutch NGOs (including Pax Christi Netherlands) against the use of Child Soldiers throughout the world.

Amnesty International Report 2007: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/americas/south-america/colombia#report>

ANEX #1**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GIRL CHILD SOLDIER IN COLOMBIA**

A representative day in the life of a girl child soldier in Colombia is constructed based on the interviews with the girls in Colombia. The construction of a day in the life is a composite taken from the descriptions of the training, duties and daily activities taken from all the interviews from Colombia.

4:45 to 5:00 a.m.: Morning wake-up. Organize and pack up everything in order to be able to leave.

5:00 a.m. Coffee and exercise

6:00 a.m. Breakfast

7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Rigorous training that included sit-ups, running in streams, navigating through tunnels, walking on the high bar and training that taught them how to train others

12:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00 p.m. Rest

2:00 p.m. Jogging and additional exercise

3:00 to 5:30 p.m. Group sessions on relations. Reports on how others had treated you and how you had treated others. Emphasis who had treated you badly.

6:00 p.m. Supper

7:00 to 9:00 p.m. If not cooking, assigned to guard duty or patrolling. Patrolling involved walking and keeping watch over the area surrounding the camp in general, bringing in food and collaborating with civilians and recharging radio batteries. Guard duty involved guarding the camp site.

9:00 p.m. Flag down was a time to parade in front of the commanders. Coffee allowed if it was cold.

9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. Walk in patrols or moving camp

9:00 until dawn Partying and drinking after battle
