



Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army

Always fighting for the dignity of the Colombian people

Announcement on minors in the conflict

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It is clear that in Colombia the lack of education, opportunity and hope, generate a scenario in which children and young people end up in social marginality, exhibiting their physical and psychological integrity, or they become an easy prey for war.

This was recently reported in the Bogota Council before the commission of illegal and massive recruitments of young people by the army, through the so-called "sweeps", conducted almost exclusively in impoverished popular sectors.

Between January 2008 and December 2012, 466,377 young people were forcibly incorporated into military service. Among high school graduates, almost 90% came from strata 0,1,2 and 3, while only 0.7 corresponded to stratum 4; 0.04% to stratum 5 and 0.02% to stratum 6 (1). In this way, the State maintains a policy of forced recruitment, changing the poor into cannon fodder in a war that only benefits the establishment, safeguarding the children of the oligarchy from the dangers of the fratricide confrontation.

We believe that the state should give up the aforementioned "sweeps", which in many cases involve minors. The practice of the State and the paramilitaries to use children under 15 in the armed conflict should cease and they should fully recognize the right to conscientious objection to compulsory military service, considering that the respect for the inner convictions is a fundamental right of any person.

The State and its military forces have carried out a policy of using children in the conflict systematically. The target of the so-called "military civic programs" is the abuse of children and adolescents for war propaganda and recruitment: "Police for a day", "military Circus" and others where children, far from turning them away from the conflict, are dressed in military uniforms and involved in the confrontation in a wily way. Suffice it to recall the last parade of July 20 in Bogota, where the military forces of a country immersed in a long armed conflict showed uniformed children who marched alongside military combat units.

Without any doubt, the most despicable use of children in the armed conflict by the regime has been the systematic recruitment of children under 15 years, train them first in military and police units, to infiltrate them in the ranks of the guerrilla movement, in order to gather intelligence and attack the guerrilla combatants, especially our Comandantes. Without going any further, last May 2014, the FARC-EP handed over three young people to the ICRC when it discovered they were under 15. They had been trained in military installations of the National Police, and were then infiltrated in our structures with the aim of killing guerrillas and carrying out acts of sabotage. The same thing was done with another minor last week in the department of Caquetá, trained in army battalions in the city of Bogotá, who was also handed over to the ICRC.

It should be specified that in the general development of the confrontation, some children have found refuge in our camps, along with other survivors and displaced persons, after horrific massacres, assassinations and threats against members of communities accused by state forces - whether they be military/police or paramilitary forces - of being supporters of the guerrilla.

The FARC-EP has felt obliged, on numerous occasions, to receive families, widows or surviving orphans whose parents had been killed by paramilitary groups or directly by government forces that attacked their communities. In these cases, we have always acted in compliance with the protection function to Internationally Protected Persons, conflict victims, including children, as well as serving as a refuge for people persecuted for their ideas, thoughts, origin or condition.

Contrary to what the institutional propaganda and those seeking to de-legitimize us say, under no circumstances have we proceeded to forcibly recruit minors nor any fighter; which, moreover, would be totally counterproductive for the political deployment of the FARC-EP. Our Fronts, complying with revolutionary principles and the regulations that govern us constantly have to dissuade a significant number of children from joining the FARC-EP, promoting the idea of desisting until they reach the age at which they will be able to be aware of why and wherefore they want to be linked to the insurgent struggle.

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It is a notorious fact that it is not possible to keep any fighter against his will; there is also the figure of 'separation from the organization', in cases where for reasons of physical, psychological or disciplinary order it is not relevant or appropriate to have some particular person in our ranks.

Coinciding with the IHL, the FARC-EP rules of recruitment don't allow enlistment of children under 15 years and those rules are clear regarding the age, stating: "The entrance to the FARC-EP is personal, voluntary and conscious between 15 and 30 years". In this regard, the Seventh National Guerrilla Conference (1982), confirmed this rule, stating that: "4. Recruitment: The Fronts will create recruitment commissions, which must be prepared for their duty to recruit men and women who, without any exception, should be between 15 and 30 years old; (...). The recruited must be physically fit and mentally mature, ie clear about why he or she joins (...)"

Today, as People's Army, we want to take new steps and take effective measures which contribute to involve less and less youth in a military confrontation imposed on us and which without any doubt creates risks for the life and the fundamental rights of everyone involved. Therefore, the FARC-EP, besides considering the need to provide clear measures of de-escalation of the conflict to accelerate progress towards peace, announce to the country and to the world, taking into account the Optional Protocol of 2000, today an Appendix of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, decide not to incorporate, from now on, minors under age of 17 in the guerrilla ranks. At the same time, we express our desire to reach a peace deal with social justice soon.

Peace Delegation of the FARC-EP

(1) In Colombia, a socio-economic stratification system was implemented in the 1980's to classify urban populations into different strata with similar economic characteristics. The system classifies areas on a scale from 1 to 6 with 1 as the lowest income area and 6 as the highest. In 1994, this stratification policy was made into law in order to grant subsidies to the poorest residents.

Last modified on Sunday, 15 February 2015 14:49

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