



**WATCHLIST OUTRAGED BY WIDE SPECTRUM OF ABUSES
AGAINST CHILDREN IN COLOMBIA**

CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

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February 18, 2004, New York and Bogotá ...Children in Colombia have been marked as targets for killing and maiming, victimized by sexual violence, lured and forced into the ranks of combatants, used as informants, driven from their homes, deprived of access to humanitarian assistance and education and devastated by decades of armed conflict, according to a new report by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

Guerilla groups, paramilitaries, government forces and national police all perpetrate violence and abuses against children and adolescents and these crimes are committed with a high level of impunity, according to the report, *Colombia's War on Children*.

In this 45-page report, released today in Bogotá, Colombia (Hotel Suites Jones, Calle 61 No. 5-39, at 10:30 a.m.), the Watchlist calls for action to stop violence and protect children.

“Colombian children are being deprived of their opportunities for a better future. Countless children are losing their families, their homes, their communities, and even their lives to the on-going conflict,” said Julia Freedson, Coordinator of the Watchlist. “We are outraged that the international community is standing by so silently. We are calling for immediate action, particularly by the UN Security Council, to respond with the resources and remedies proportionate to the magnitude of this crisis,” she said.

Approximately seven children in Colombia are killed violently every day. Colombia has the world's second highest population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with at least 2.5

million IDPs. Up to 55 percent of these people are children. Many children, especially internally displaced children and those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities lack basic health services, education and access to humanitarian assistance, according to the report.

“Every day children in our country are killed, maimed, tortured, threatened, violated, intimidated and used. They cannot wait any longer for these war crimes to end and to receive the protection and security they deserve,” said Amalia Eraso, Director of the Coalition Against the Involvement of Boys, Girls and Youth to the Armed Conflict in Colombia, a Bogotá based coalition that collaborated closely with the Watchlist on this report.

The report directs specific recommendations to guerilla and paramilitary groups, the Government of Colombia, the United Nations system, particularly the UN Security Council, the Government of the United States and the international donor community. The following are a few examples:

- **To Guerrilla and Paramilitary Groups:** End killings and maiming of children and all civilians; and end torture, mutilation of cadavers, sexual violence, death threats and intimidation and indiscriminate use of weapons;
- **To the Government of Colombia:** End impunity for abuses against children by aggressively investigating and prosecuting murders, disappearances, recruitment and kidnappings of children, with meaningful penalty for all crimes;
- **To the UN Security Council:** Include the conflict in Colombia on the agenda of the Security Council as an urgent matter of international peace and security, based on its severe, life-threatening impact on children and regional implications;
- **To the Government of the United States:** Uphold U.S. legal standards, which state that military aid to Colombia must be contingent upon Colombia’s compliance with human rights standards. This includes specifically the government breaking ties between army units and paramilitary forces and fulfilling its obligation to protect the security and rights of children.

**The full report is available in English and Spanish on www.watchlist.org
Media interviews in Spanish and English can be arranged.**

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a network of NGOs dedicated to monitoring and reporting on violations against children in armed conflict. The Watchlist is directed by a Steering Committee of leaders in child protection including, CARE International, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Save the Children alliance, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and World Vision. Watchlist has worked with many local and international organizations on the preparation of this report.



FACT SHEET: COLOMBIA'S WAR ON CHILDREN

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Colombia's War on Children, a 45-page report released in Bogotá today by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict documents the following situation in Colombia:

Violations of Children's Security and Rights:

- Estimated 175,000 to 220,000 **refugees** and 2.5 million **IDPs**, 48 to 55 percent are under 18 years old;
- Between 11,000 and 14,000 **child soldiers**; indigenous and Afro-Colombian children are often targeted for recruitment;
- Government armed forces, paramilitary and guerrilla groups have **blocked humanitarian supply shipments**;
- Estimated 3 million children aged 11 to 17 are **not in school**;
- 2.5 of every 1,000 young women in Colombia is **raped** (estimated);
- Estimates range from 20,000 to 35,000 children forced into **commercial sexual work**;
- Estimated 15,000 to 30,000 **street children** in Colombia;
- Approximately 4,000 children killed with **small arms** every year;
- At least 100,000 **landmines** in Colombia, causing at least 96 mine-related child deaths in 2002.

(Sources for this information are included in *Colombia's War on Children*.)

The war in Colombia has been ongoing for three decades and has claimed the lives of thousands of children. The following is one example: during an operation of the national army in the indigenous community in Betoyes, (between April 27 and May 1, 2003) soldiers of the XVIII Brigade of the Colombian military, wearing armbands of paramilitary groups, raped and killed a pregnant 16-year-old girl, cut her stomach open, tore out her fetus and threw her body in the nearby river. Three other girls, ages 11, 12 and 15, were reportedly raped.

The full report, including recommendations, is available at www.watchlist.org