



**** EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL 10:00AM EDT, TUESDAY 3 APRIL 2012****

Press Contact:
Brooke Blanchard
brookeb@watchlist.org
Tel. 212-551-3014

NEW REPORT: RISKS FOR CHILDREN IN COLOMBIA'S ARMED CONFLICT ON THE RISE; PROTECTION BY COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT INSUFFICIENT

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Demands UN Security Council, Government of Colombia, Donors Take Action

April 3, New York City – Risks for children caught in Colombia's decades-long war have increased, in spite of the government's efforts to protect children, according to a report released today by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) - notorious for their use of child soldiers - have stepped up recruitment campaigns after losing thousands of troops in the government's counter-insurgency attacks. The government's efforts to demobilize paramilitary groups in the mid-2000s have led to the rise of the new armed actors that employ the same abusive tactics.

The report, *No One to Trust. Children and Armed Conflict in Colombia*, finds that government initiatives aimed to protect children from violence are insufficient, particularly in remote areas where armed groups exert *de facto* authority. Civilian state authorities are either absent from these areas or ignore reports of horrific violations, allowing armed actors to operate with impunity.

"Violence levels are incredibly high," said Yvonne Kemper, Watchlist Officer and researcher for the report. "These children face threats from all sides and have no one to turn to for help, or at least no one they consider trustworthy." Kemper warns of resorting to military solutions when dealing with protection of civilians, which may attract retaliation by armed groups. "To regain people's trust, the government needs to deploy trained government officials in these areas that put the interest of the victims first and ensure perpetrators are punished without exceptions," she said.

No One to Trust is released as the UN Security Council's dedicated working group discusses what actions to take to address the situation of children in Colombia's armed conflict. In the report, Watchlist outlines detailed policy recommendations and demands that the government of

Colombia, the UN Security Council and donors, including the United States and the European Union, take specific actions to help children affected by armed conflict in Colombia.

“Protecting the rights of children in Colombia should be at the core of building lasting peace in the country,” said Eva Smets, Director of Watchlist. “We understand that the Colombian government and its bilateral trade and development partners are eager to move on. But this is not the time to downplay the threats these children are facing. We need to work together to ensure that they receive the justice and care they are entitled to.”

For a full list of findings and recommendations, please request an embargoed version of the report.

###

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, established in 2001, is an international network of non-governmental organizations striving to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

Watchlist is a program of the Women’s Refugee Commission. The Women’s Refugee Commission is affiliated with and is legally part of the International Rescue Committee, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Neither the Women’s Refugee Commission nor the Watchlist receive direct financial support from the IRC.