

tool 59 Child-Led Advocacy in Colombia

Case study

In September 2012, the Colombian government announced the start of formal peace talks with the FARC, one of the main armed groups in the Colombian conflict listed since 2003 in the annex of the Secretary-General's annual report for recruitment and use of children. In February 2013, on occasion of the 'red hand day', a group of children affected by the conflict participated in a public audience at the Colombian Congress to present a 'Book of Dreams' outlining their expectations and proposals for the peace process. The initiative was coordinated by a national civil society network and the event was highly publicized in a context that remains highly politicized and even polarized.

The following risks were identified prior to the event:

- Children could be overwhelmed or feel at risk because of public exposure.
- Potential politicization of the children's intervention.
- Aggressive questions from journalists could traumatize children.

The following process was adopted to ensure that participants were adequately prepared, supported and protected:

- 1) Participation in the initiative was open only to children who were already actively engaged in youth groups or other community structures where they could find overall support and coaching before and after the event.
- 2) Parents were informed of the initiative and gave their consent.
- 3) The selected group of children played a central part in the planning of the initiative and representatives of the civil society network accompanied them throughout the event.
- 4) The civil society network organized a preliminary information session with journalists to sensitize them to the particular vulnerability of these children.
- 5) A formal agreement was made with the TV channel that covered the event, outlining basic principles and ground rules.

In other advocacy initiatives organized by this civil society network, media outreach has also been done through a press conference. In such cases, attendance is reserved only for a select number of journalists known by the civil society network for their professionalism and sensitivity to the issues of children affected by armed conflict.

related tools

-  tool 58 – 'Practice Standards in Children's Participation' (Save the Children Alliance)