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UN: PUT CHILD RIGHTS UP FRONT IN PEACE PROCESSES

Resolution highlighting links between child protection, conflict prevention, and peace expected to be adopted

NEW YORK, July 9, 2018 – At today’s open debate on children and armed conflict, the Security Council and UN member states should redouble their efforts to support children affected by war, said Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Coalition against the Involvement of Children in the Colombian Armed Conflict (COALICO). The debate comes on the heels of the UN Secretary-General’s annual [report](#) on children and armed conflict, which highlights the importance of integrating child protection into conflict prevention and resolution strategies.

The Security Council is expected to adopt a resolution at today’s debate that highlights how protecting children can contribute to conflict prevention and sustaining peace. The resolution calls on governments, UN agencies, and mediators to integrate child protection provisions, including those relating to the release and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed actors, into all peace and ceasefire negotiations.

At this year’s debate, Yenny Londoño, a former child soldier from Colombia, will brief the Security Council. At 13, Londoño was recruited by the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) and spent nine months in their ranks. In 2014, she represented child victims in peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP, drawing attention to the special needs of children and adolescents – especially girls – formerly associated with the guerrilla group.

“In Colombia and other countries affected by conflict, former child soldiers often face stigmatization in their communities, as well as serious challenges accessing basic services like health, education, and nutrition,” said Hilda Molano Casas, coordinator of COALICO. “The UN and its member states should protect children’s rights by supporting reintegration and taking into account the different needs of boys, girls, and ethnic minorities.”

In Colombia, the signing of a peace agreement between the FARC-EP and the government in late 2016 presented a unique opportunity to improve the protection of children. Following the FARC-EP's formal demobilization and disbanding last year, the armed group was removed from the Secretary-General's annual 'list of shame,' published last month. However, dissidents from the FARC-EP and the *Ejército Popular de Liberación* (EPL), the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), and other armed groups continue to commit serious abuses against children, including killing and maiming, forced recruitment and use, and sexual violence. In his latest report, the Secretary-General notes a sharp increase in 2017 in the number of incidents in Colombia in which children were killed or maimed as a result of shooting, crossfire, and landmines.

In October 2017, the ELN committed to end the recruitment of children under 15 into its ranks as part of a temporary bilateral ceasefire with the government. Watchlist and its Colombian civil society partner COALICO urge the ELN, the EPL, and other armed groups in Colombia to cease all abductions and recruitment of children under 18, and to immediately release them from their ranks. The Colombian government should reinforce measures to prevent the recruitment and use of children and other violations, as well as strengthen support for reintegration and rehabilitation of children and adolescents who have been released.

"The early inclusion of child protection in peace talks not only helps build good will between the negotiating parties, but it is also vital for the protection of society's most vulnerable," said Adrienne Lapar, partnerships officer at Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. "The ELN and the Colombian government should prioritize children's wellbeing by making concrete commitments to protect their rights."

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a New York-based coalition of nongovernmental organizations that seeks to end violations against children in armed conflict and to guarantee their rights. For more information, please visit: <https://watchlist.org/>.

The Coalition against the Involvement of Children in the Colombian Armed Conflict (COALICO) is a network of national and international civil society organizations that seeks to positively transform the effects of the Colombian armed conflict, especially the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, through monitoring, advocacy, and defending and promoting children's rights. For more information, please visit: <http://coalico.org/>.